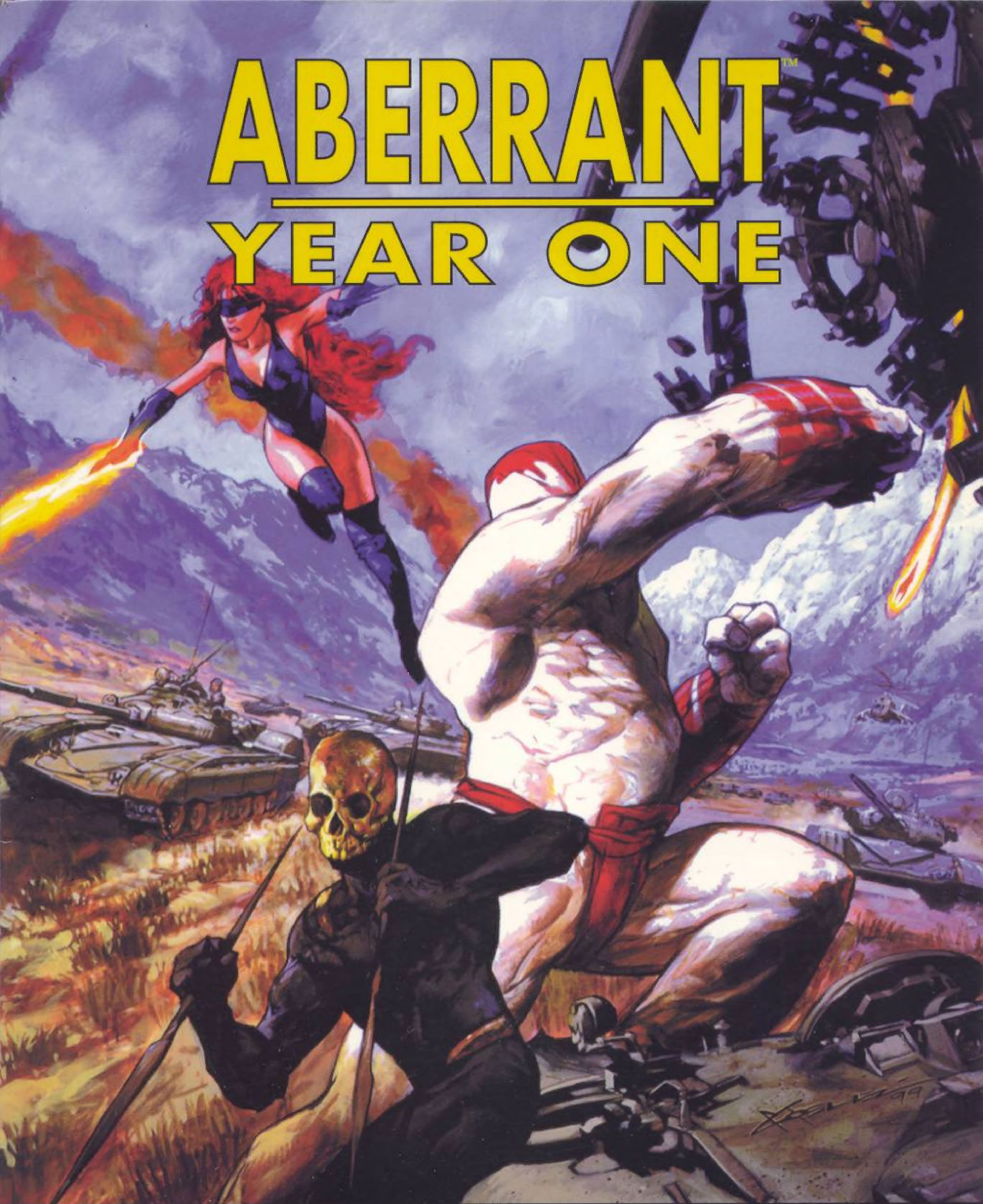


ABERRANTTM

YEAR ONE



To Bask in the Light...

The Aberrant world is a vast and often terrifying place. Who knows what secrets lurk in the Nova Age of 2008? From the maze-like alleys of Hong Kong to the eerily sterile paradise of Addis Ababa, this sourcebook provides all manner of exotic locales for characters to control...or destroy.

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the news

Introduction

Transcript from the Cable News Channel's report, "New York's Nova Explosion," Don Wilson reporting:

While there can be no doubt that the nova phenomenon has already caused a marked change on the world around us, few places have been as powerfully affected as New York. From the rapidly changing face of the medical community to the decimating rampage of antinova racist Percy Andreesen, New York has had a chance to see more novas in action than any other city.

But what has the cost been to the Big Apple, and will the situation remain stable, or was the devastation caused by Percy Andreesen just the start of something that can only get worse?

Church of Michael Archangel Reverend Milo Arboghost believes the novas are a sure sign that the Apocalypse is just around the corner, that the change of the millennium on our calendars simply doesn't match up with the schedule of the Almighty. While many of us might scoff at the notion, a surprising number of people are beginning to think Arboghost just might have the right idea.

Reverend Arboghost, who many might remember for his support of David Duke back in the '90s, has long since recanted his past anti-black sentiments. These days, he claims the true danger is that novas might try to breed with the "divine children of God" and bring damnation to us all.

On the other side of the fence from Arboghost sits the rapidly growing cult called the Followers of the Avatar and its radical leader, the mysterious Avatar himself. The Avatar claims that the novas who've revealed themselves thus far are merely the first to receive God's blessing, the first to take the next step in human evolution. While the Avatar remains a mystery, his followers have gone out of their way to spread his gospel and in some cases have used force to make their point known.

The Followers of the Avatar are a New York City-based cult, and to date their proselytizing has been strictly limited to the metropolitan New York area, but their message is spreading far and wide. What exactly are they saying? Well, it seems their loudest message goes out to skinheads, right-wing supremacists and racists of various sorts. Several known antinova white supremacists have suffered vicious assaults, some while in their own homes. In a recent OpNet post sent to the *New York Times*, the Avatar removed any doubts that his followers are behind the attacks against racist organizations....

(Cut to a silhouette, obviously wearing an elaborate headpiece of some sort.)

"The people of New York no longer have to fear for their lives. They need no longer worry about keeping their doors unlocked if they so

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desire. The time has come for the city of New York to once again become a place where people can live in peace, without worrying that some twisted soul is preparing to beat their sons or rape their wives and daughters. The Followers of the Avatar will see to that."

While most people object to the methods employed by the Followers of the Avatar, the cult is merely one example of how novas have changed life in New York City. So you can imagine the more notorious novas are already having a serious impact on the city. Even when they are doing nothing more than being seen in New York, novas have an almost immediate affect on those around them. Take, for example, Ray's Delicatessen on the Avenue of the Americas. Ray's has never suffered for business, but ever since The Fireman made the deli one of his regular hangouts, business has been standing room only. It's not at all unusual for people to wait outside the deli for up to two hours to get a seat, though Ray Costas, the owner of the restaurant, has promised to expand as soon as possible to accommodate the growing demand for food. But even more importantly, New York remains a place where novas like to visit. Perhaps it's the United Nations that draws novas from around the world, or perhaps they've simply come to be on one of the late-night talk shows, but whatever the reason, the novas keep coming, and they bring with them their own special form of celebrity and chaos.



NEW YORK CITY HISTORY

New York City remains an entity unto itself, a thriving metropolis that is as complex as it is staggering in size and population. The appearance of novas hasn't changed anything about that fact. But the impact in other ways has been substantial. Though New York has always been a broadcasting center for the major networks, it has now become a hub of information on the novas and their activities. The N! network has assured that if nothing else has. Whether the network's location is a result of the nova presence in New York or vice versa, both have become comfortably entrenched in Manhattan, and there's little that's likely to change that.

But the presence of novas in New York has had very strange effects on the city as a whole. On the financial front, the novas have not only boosted the already booming tourist trade in New York, they have helped create an industry that was never a part of the city's financial strength in the past: biological studies. Rather like the Japanese *Saisho*, the New York City government decided to employ novas to help with some of the basics that were still eluding people everywhere. Enriche Meludos, a janitor at New York University before his powers erupted, leads a group of talented scientists in the examination of the human mind and body. Currently this group is working on several projects, but one of the most promising is a study on the genetic similarities found in a substantial number of violent criminals. Meludos believes that there might actually be a genetic culprit in the worst cases of sociopathic violence, and his studies seem to prove him right.

Another reason that New York is thriving in the aftermath of the *Galatea* explosion and the subsequent coming of the novas is the Project Utopia offices located near the United Nations Building. Several businesses have taken full advantage of Project Utopia's presence in the city and have gone into merchandising with a zealous fervor. The legendary Garment District has become the primary place for licensing the names and likenesses of the more famous novas.

From a financial point of view, Manhattan has never been healthier. It's organized religion that has taken the blows from the presence of novas. Novas have shaken the foundation of the major religions in

ways that many people simply refuse to acknowledge; New York is one place where the people simply seem to have no choice but to recognize the theological ramifications. Every major religion in the world is meshed into the societal fabric of New York, and the strains have been showing and growing over the years. From the radical fundamentalists who insist the novas are demons, to their liberal counterparts who believe they must surely be angels, the people of New York City have all come to loathe or love the novas for their own reasons. One of the worst problems in the eyes of the more established faiths is that the aberrants — by their very existence — shake the foundations of their beliefs. Many of their followers are asking questions that their religious leaders simply can't answer easily. Are the novas proof of Darwin's theories? If so, does that disprove the claims of the religions who've disputed the theory of evolution? Are they truly angels or demons? And if so, which are they and how should they be treated? There is a growing dissatisfaction with the lack of answers, and the result is a fraying of society in New York as a whole, though the weakened spots are only just beginning to show themselves.

Important Features

New York City is a mecca for patrons of the arts and tourists alike. It is, as has been stated numerous times in the past, the city that never sleeps. Manhattan in particular has been a sight of endless night life for decades and the coming of the novas has only enhanced that fact. Several novas who've gained fame and fortune from their new abilities have made a point of visiting the Big Apple regularly, and they've even taken to opening their own restaurants and bars. The most famous of these is Star Lord's, the first in a popular chain of restaurants that openly display memorabilia from past incidents that have made the novas famous. Star Lord's has a little something from almost every nova's past, one example being a chunk of the asphalt where The Fireman first erupted onto the scene. Standing invitations to the novas for free food and drink have made the place an overnight success, and the occasional appearance of Lydia Divine — one of the co-owners — hasn't slowed things down in the least. At present, there are three Star

Lord's open in major cities, with more expected in the future.

The Project Utopia facilities near the United Nations have become a hotspot for the novas. It's not uncommon to find a few of the better established novas coming in for a checkup or just to make speeches to the newly erupted while passing through town. As the communications industry has always been an integral part of New York's finances, many novas make it a point to come through the city at least a few times a year, if only to make sure they get seen by the press and interviewed on the most popular television talk shows.

The Big Apple is, according to several novas, ripe for the picking. Judging by the warm embrace of the city's financial districts, they just may be right.

Luminaries

Two of the best known novas in New York have made their dislike of each other public knowledge, despite the fact that they have never met and aren't likely to in the near future. Enriche Meludos, very definitely one of the wealthiest novas in the world and one savvy enough not to flaunt it, and the nova calling himself the Avatar do not like each other in the least. Meludos has made public his opinion that the Avatar is a madwoman. In turn the Avatar has stated that Meludos is a misguided fool who's allowed himself to be seduced by promises of wealth and fame that he will never see come to fruition.

Enriche Meludos

Background: Enriche Meludos grew up in Spanish Harlem and fully expected to live his entire life there. The eruption of his intellect took care of that almost immediately. He was "discovered" after he spent three hours hotly debating a theory about the sudden appearance of the novas with not one but two of New York's finest scientific minds. The man, who had dropped out of high school at the age of 15, was caught on tape by a student while he was not only disproving the postulated theory about bacteria being the culprit behind the novas, but doing so while mopping the floors of the science wing at NYU. One week later, the dean of the university offered him a job. One hour later, the dean began regretting his offer. NYU is making money from the discoveries of their resident megagenius, but not nearly so much as they would have liked: The careful wording in the added pages of the contract between Meludos and the university gives him the lion's share of the profits. Still, the substantial increase in the finances of the institution has been enough to take the sting out of the lesson. Meludos holds the patents for enough new medical advances and chemical synthetics to in-



timidate the very brightest scientific minds.

Description: Meludos has been compared to Einstein not only mentally but also physically. He is normally seen in jeans and a T-shirt and almost always with something fattening and sweet to cram into his mouth. The only time he doesn't eat is when he's talking. He has earned the nickname "Hothead" from his coworkers, not only for his willingness to berate anyone who crosses his path, but also for the fact that when he is deep in thought, smokelike wisps of energy rise from his scalp. Though he's only 27 years old, his demeanor and prematurely graying hair make him appear much older. Meludos, despite himself it seems, has won the hearts of many of the people on the street with his outspoken attitudes on almost every subject. They may not agree with him, but most people will at least listen when he speaks.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 5, Awareness 5, Computer 5, Engineering 5, Investigation 5, Legerdemain 4, Linguistics, Medicine 5 (Biomolecular Engineering), Science 5 (Chemistry, Quantum Physics)

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 5, Influence 2, Resources 5

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 9, Taint 4 (Steaming Scalp)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Perception ••• (Analytic Taste/ Touch), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Analyze Weakness, Eidetic Memory, Lightning Calculator, Medical and Scientific Prodigy)

Quantum Powers: None



The Avatar

Background: Milo Arbogast was born and raised a fundamentalist Christian. In his world, the Lord spoke and the people listened, end of discussion. When the novas first showed themselves, he agreed readily with the minister of his church that they were surely the spawn of the devil. Then his own eruption occurred. Being a man of strong faith, the problem with displaying satanic powers was a very real one. Even as he tested the limits of his abilities, Arbogast constantly damned himself for daring to tread in places where only angels or devils should walk. He liked what he could do, and he liked the changes that slowly took place in his own body, as he went from being pudgy to being lean and hard. He liked that he could get a person to do his bidding and then make them forget that they had ever been under his influence. In short, he found the powers he was granted were at least as strong a draw as the faith that had

supported him his entire life. It was probably inevitable that something inside of him would snap. As the Reverend Milo Arbogast, he condemns the aberrants as tools of Satan. As the Avatar, he spews forth a stream of diatribes about how he and his brethren are a sign from God Almighty, and are the personification of His divine will. He has no idea that he is his own worst enemy, or if he does, he won't admit it.

Description: The Avatar is a striking figure, normally hidden in shadows or behind a mask, but a powerful, imposing figure nonetheless. His words are full of righteous conviction, and his goal is to destroy the corrupters of the world and bring the grace of God to all the faithful. The followers of the Avatar are extremely devout and listen to his words as if they came directly from the Lord. His sermons fire their passion and convince them that he is, indeed, the Avatar of the Lord Almighty. The only part any of them ever find strange is that they can never remember exactly what he or she looks like when they've left a sermon. Try though they might, there is nothing, not even a gender, for them to ascribe to the figure that has become the most influential person in their lives.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5

Abilities: Brawl 4, Command 5, Intimidation 2, Perform 5, Streetwise 5, Style 3, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Influence 3, Followers 5, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 6, Taint 4 (Halo, Multiple Personality Disorder)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Manipulation •••• (Trickster, The Voice), Mega-Charisma •• (Commanding Presence, Soothe)

Quantum Powers: Domination ••, Empathic Manipulation •••, Invulnerability •• (Kinetic Damage)

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From the World
News Net,
July 17th, 2008

Stories continue to spread about an unknown nova terrorist working in Montreal, Canada. In what is believed to be the 17th related incident, City Councilman Marcus Smith was found brutally murdered in his penthouse apartment in the city's "Anglo district."

The body of Mr. Smith, a known proponent of the faltering Anglophone movement — the movement to see English instated as the official language of Quebec — and a strong supporter of the United Canada Agenda, was discovered yesterday by his fiancée, Elizabeth Maynard. Though the details are sketchy as to exactly what happened to Mr. Smith, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police did state that they have no doubts about the fact that he was murdered and that a nova was likely responsible for the death.

The only evidence actually mentioned to the press was a note declaring that French-Canada will be free from the tyranny of the English, regardless of how many lives must be taken in the pursuit of liberty. The note was allegedly signed by the *Citoyens pour le Supremacy des Français*, a radical group that has grown in popularity over the last decade.

The CSF is only one of a dozen different groups who have lobbied for the independence of Quebec over the years. But unlike many of the other organizations that would prefer to see Quebec separated from the rest of Canada and made a separate country, this group apparently backs its rhetoric with action.

The CSF has mostly limited its activities to idle threats in the past. However, the recent series of bizarre deaths in Montreal have led officials to the conclusion that there is at least one but possibly up to three novas who have decided to join with the group in order to make certain that Montreal and all of Quebec are allowed to break away from Canada.

Though the situation is growing rather dire according to several sources, the RCMP and the Canadian government have allegedly declined offers of assistance from Team Tomorrow Americas and Team Tomorrow Europe as well. Utopian officials and T2M members have not commented on these allegations officially.

The string of 17 deaths goes back over four years now, and all of them have certain obvious connections that lend credence to the claims that French-Canadian terrorists might be behind the murders. In every case the victims have been either strong advocates for making English the language of choice in Quebec, members of the local government who are opposed to the separatist movement

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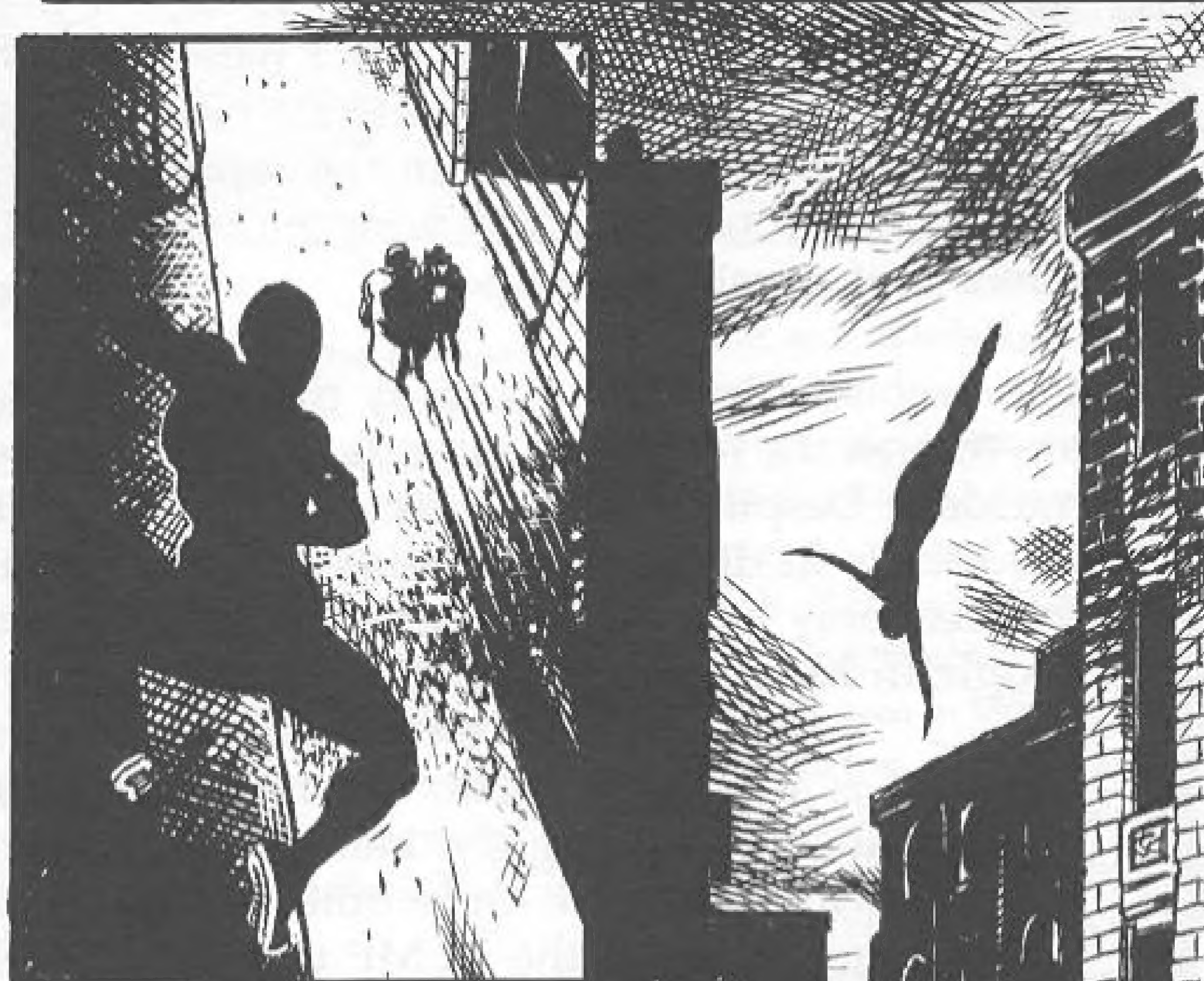
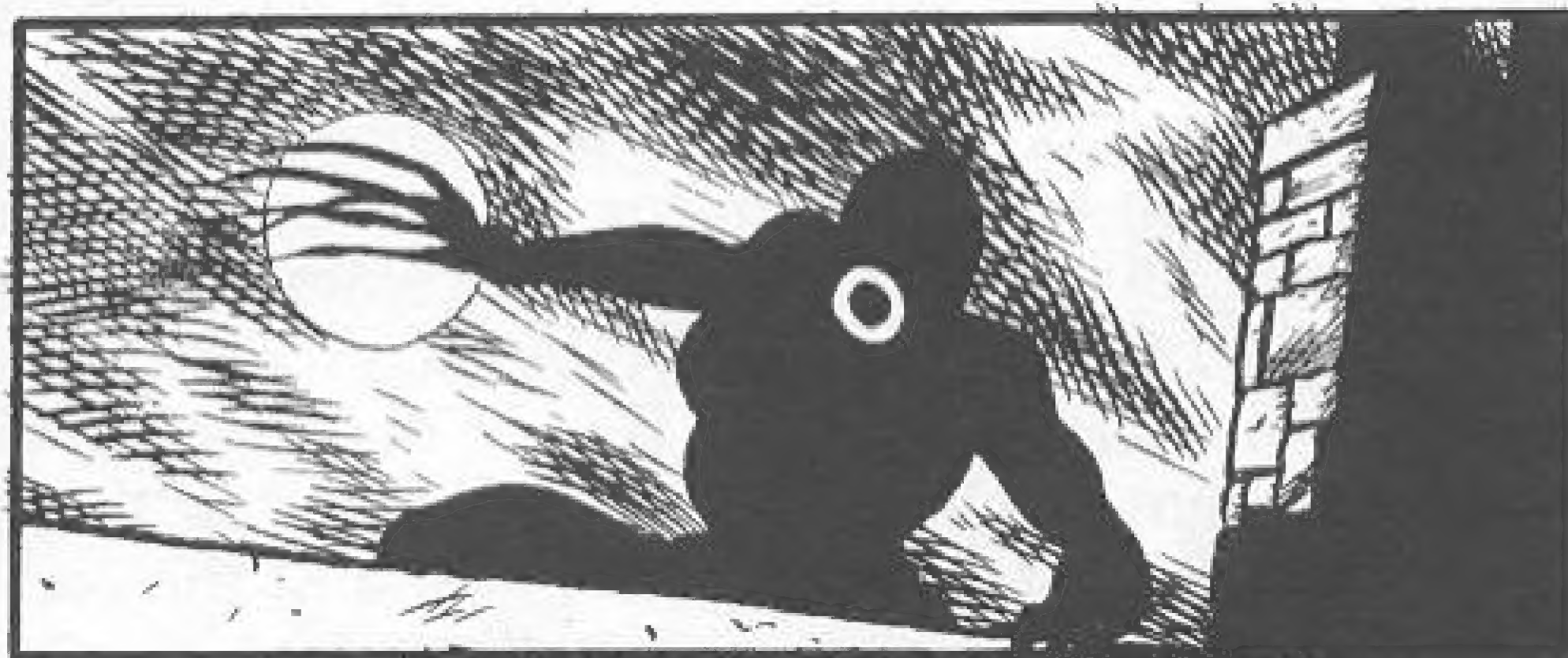
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or politicians seeking to increase Utopia's influence in the area. Beyond these facts, there is little known about how each died, except that their endings were violent and a note giving credit for the murders to the CSF were present in each case.

As many of our viewers already know, Montreal has been a city in conflict with itself over the separatist movement for some years now, and there have been occasional threats of terrorism and even a few minor incidents in the past. But the new string of murders has many of the locals, French- and English-speaking alike, worried about the future of the city and the province.

Montreal has always been a little more "level-headed" about the idea of breaking away from the rest of Canada

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than most of Quebec, but that's been changing in recent years. The relocation of several major industries from Quebec to other parts of Canada has cost Montreal a substantial portion of its financial strength. The recent move by Gerard Textiles and Alousion Chemical Laboratories to Toronto almost doubled the already heavy unemployment levels in the city, and many of the citizens believe the separation of Quebec from the rest of the country would force the companies to return, especially if the new Quebec government decided to enforce tariffs on other nations. As it currently stands, Montreal's 19% unemployment rate has brought desperate times to the city, and the resurgence in the separatist movement has used the claim that the tariffs would bring industry back to the city as a method of garnering support.

The problems brought about by the increasing popularity of the idea are numerous, but the most striking one remains the 17 unsolved murders. Despite the best efforts of the RCMP, there have been no solid leads in discovering the identity of the killer or killers, a fact that has only increased the already heavy tensions many of the people in Montreal are feeling.

Montreal is a city in turmoil, and until some form of resolution is brought about regarding the killings and the guilty parties, the tensions will only grow. Only time will tell if this latest murder delivers any clues for the RCMP to follow up on or eventually results in the capture of whomever is responsible. In the meantime, there's little reason to believe that Montreal will settle down and wait for events to change of their own accord. Someone is killing the leaders of the city, and the general consensus is that the parties responsible won't be satisfied to wait very long for changes in the way Canada looks at Quebec before taking action against another target.

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MONTREAL HISTORY

Introduction

Montreal is not a happy city. In a time when most economies are doing very well, most cities are thriving, everything in Montreal seems to be going wrong. Industries are failing or moving away, and tensions between the government and the people are reaching the boiling point. Unemployment and theft are both on the rise, and the general consensus among the population is that matters are only going to get worse before they get any better. And then there are the murders. Though the crimes have been brutal, the majority of the populace seems to support the agenda of the force behind the killings, if not the actual killings themselves.

The separatist mentality in Montreal is reaching almost fanatic proportions, and the RCMP seems unwilling to accept help from anyone. Despite numerous offers to help, none of the officials seems willing to let outsiders handle their affairs or even come to their aid. Team Tomorrow and Utopia are at a loss: It's rare that they've run across anyone who simply did not want to be helped, who so willingly refused even simple advice.

Important Data

Montreal takes its name from the old French title given to the mountain around which the city was built: Mont Réal (in English, Mount Royal), technically an island surrounded by the Ottawa and Saint Lawrence rivers. Temperatures in summertime rise into the high teens and low twenties Celsius, but in the winter months, the average drops to the negative teens.

The city was originally founded by French settlers, and has kept a great deal of the influence from those days over the centuries. The vast majority of the population speaks French as their primary language, though English is also spoken by about a third of the population. Europeans immigrants make up another 20% of the population.

Relocation of the major textile industries in the area has led to problems for the city, but they are not as bad as they seem. Tourism is still very beneficial to the economy at the present time, but the 17 recent murders and the tension between the French and English factions in the city is starting to change that. The local government is working under the assumption that if they can avoid too much publicity in the affair, they can continue to draw crowds.

Despite the problems in Montreal, there is a vibrant nightlife, and the entertainment industry is still doing well. The main strip, which actually doubles as the main business offices during the day, is normally quite active, at least in the warmer months. But the same problem is continuing to cause troubles on that front as well. Quebec's citizens want to be free from the rest of Canada, and their resentment of the unchanging policies is growing heated, even in Montreal, where the tensions have always been less. Though they wear no colors or special garments to identify themselves, several groups of mostly college-age youths have taken to attacking anyone who can't speak French, and they seem to be getting financial aid in the form of very expensive lawyers paid to keep them out of jail, even when they are caught red-handed.

History

Montreal is going through a rough time. The financial instabilities that were only starting a decade before have become almost epidemic. Many companies headquartered in the city have chosen to relocate to Toronto, and not all the incentives in the world seem to be enough to convince them to stay. The growing demands of the populace for change are going unanswered, and the city's finances are beginning to crumble. Though Canada certainly has as many novas as any other part of the world, none have done much of anything to make a positive change in Montreal, and a few have made it clear that they simply do not like the area or the people. The cause for this unusual attitude could well be the death of a nova in the early part of the century. The nova, who went by the name of Reynard, was found murdered at the base of the cross-shaped Place Ville-Marie, the largest office complex in the city. Reynard had gained minor celebrity as a local entertainment icon. Numerous offers to help find his killer were made, and at that time, they were refused, politely but firmly. The one attempt by T2M to act in the city led to formal protests and a lawsuit that eventually faded away under mountains of paperwork. But the lawsuit and the murder remained fresh in peoples' minds, and T2M never bothered to try a second time.

The end result was simply that Montreal became something of a no-man's-land in the eyes of novas. No novas wanted to deal with a city that simply wished nothing to do with them, and none have. Montreal managed to avoid the problems that come from dealing with novas but has also managed to avoid the benefits.

Important Features

Mount Royal rises 232 meters above sea level and dominates the city. One of the three summits is crowned with an illuminated cross, that has become a popular landmark. The mountain view is protected by a city bylaw forbidding downtown skyscrapers from rising higher than the crest. Mount Royal Park and two large adjoining cemeteries are also among the sites on the mountain.

The heart of the city lies between the mountain and the Saint Lawrence River. The original site was along the river in an area now called Old Montreal. It is the main tourist attraction of the city, containing numerous landmark buildings. Though few of the actual buildings from the colonial era remain — most having been lost to fires and other disasters — the ones that are still there are well preserved, and a few house museums.

Place Ville-Marie, the center of the business district, is also the heart of the underground city, a connecting series of subways and passages that has grown into a sort of mall and convention area. Parking facilities, restaurants, hotels, and the Palais de Congres, a convention center, are all a part of the underground city with over 29 kilometers of walkways. In the heart of the central business district is Rue Sainte-Catherine (Saint Catherine Street) the center of Montreal's nightlife and the place where most of the violence against English-speaking members of the community has occurred.

Despite past problems, Montreal is now trying to woo Star Lord's into the area with promises of extra tax incentives if they come. Rumor has it the clubs are seriously considering the idea. Many people believe they might have ulterior motives.

Luminaries

Marie Leveulle

Background: Marie Leveulle was born in Montreal and lived there comfortably for most of her life. But when she and her family were forced to move by the demands of her father's job, things started to change for her. She hated Toronto, and she hated the people there. Very few spoke French, and Marie wanted nothing to do with the English-speaking locals, a side effect of her mother's bias, which she inherited. While the family was on their way back to Montreal for a Christmas visit with their relatives, an intoxicated trucker lost control of his rig and plowed into the family's minivan. Marie was the only survivor of the incident. She was also left injured and exposed to the biting cold. The stress of the situation caused her powers to erupt.

Marie spent three months in the wilderness, learning about her abilities and recovering from the injuries she'd suffered. By the time she came back to Montreal, she was fully healed physically and filled with rage. Within



a year she'd received her inheritance from the estate of her parents and had settled out of court for a handsome sum with the trucking company that killed her parents. Marie attends college in Montreal and stays mostly to herself. She also works hard with other members of the CSF to win Quebec's freedom from the rest of Canada. But she works harder than most people realize, carefully plotting the murders of anyone she and the other members of the group think is holding back the process of gaining that freedom.

Description: A handsome woman of 20, Marie has short brown hair and flashing green eyes. Her dress ranges from conservative to provocative, depending on her social situation, but she always dresses well. She is tall (5'9"), with broad shoulders. When "powered up," quantum energies infuse her frame, making her larger and far tougher than normal.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Arts 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Computer 3, Drive 1, Endurance 4, Finance 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Legerdemain 1, Linguistics 1 (English), Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Melee 1, Resistance 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Attunement 2, Backing 1, Cipher 4, Contacts 3, Dormancy 3, Resources 3

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 7, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Quantum Leap), Mega-Dexterity • (Accuracy), Mega-Stamina • • • (Adaptability), Mega-Appearance • (Mr. Nobody)

Quantum Powers: Armor • • •, Claws • • •

Havana, Cuba

Looking at Havana today, it's hard to imagine that only a decade ago people were willing to risk their lives in makeshift rafts to escape from the city. The Big H has become one of the hottest locations in the Western Hemisphere, a place people flock to in an effort to gain stardom, lose consciousness or both.

Seldom has a city earned so many nicknames in so short a time. From Little Hollywood to the modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah, Havana has already earned a reputation for excess and celebration. And why not? The tourist trade in Havana is booming, and conventional wisdom says that anything you want can be yours in the city, so long as you have the currency to pay for it. From high-priced call girls to spike to gambling to elites, there is nothing in Havana that isn't for sale. Tokyo may have the bleeding-edge technologies, and New York may have the best shows and restaurants, but Havana has the best vices, and in the Naught Decade, isn't that what's really important anyway?

Of course, located where it is, Havana is a mecca for those who deal out pain as well as pleasure. Mercenaries of all sorts, from old-school soldierboys for hire to *mascaras* who sell themselves to the highest bidder, have made Havana their office and Cuba as a whole their home away from home. Add onto that the casinos, brothels and state-of-the-art medical facilities (Shrapnel wounds? Detox? Or just a good old retro case of the clap?), and you have all the ingredients for success. Yep, the tabnet stories are true, as some of the biggest names around routinely fly in for a binge of sin, then check themselves into one of Havana's discreet and fashionable recovery houses.

The new government and the Medellín (not necessarily in that order) have done

everything they can to make Havana into a place where people can get what they want, when they want and how they want it; and from the evidence, they've succeeded. The laws in Cuba are fairly simple and straightforward, more or less giving the green light to anything short of violent theft, murder or rape. Yeah, yeah, we know about killjoy gadfly Oscar Casas and his constant whining about enforcing those boring Castro-era controlled-substance edicts — but you can rest easy knowing that the local law doesn't give a rat's *cojones* about them. They're paid handsomely not to. As for the three crimes that will get you into trouble, our sources say there are places where you can take care of those needs too, as long as you're willing to pay the going rate for the opportunity and the discretion. We can't say any more, but remember, what they say is true: Any vice you have can be accommodated in Havana.

And in Havana, even the "you" is up to your discretion. A fair number of researchers who've given the middle finger to PeeYeww S&T have relocated to Cuba; accordingly, there's a booming business in body alteration going on in Cuba these days. Thanks to bleeding-edge breakthroughs in genetics and medicine, it's possible to get just about anything at all done to you or even to your unborn child. It's still technically illegal to get over half of the procedures done, but remember, in Havana, "illegal" is negotiable.

Not only is it possible to get yourself rebuilt from the ground up via designer drugs and plastic surgery, but I hear you can get even trendier changes made using retroviruses. Rumor has it at least one clinic claims it can increase your chances of going nova by as much as 50%. The

**From the article
"Sin City Blues"
in *Berlichter's
Guide to Fun
Places, 2008
Edition***

cost? Somewhere in the millions for a procedure that doesn't guarantee anything. It's also possible — if the rumors are true — to get your child improved through the use of immoral retroviruses and mitochondrial DNA resequencing.

So what's the most requested change in children? Oh, you know, the usual: The beautiful people want their children to be brighter, better looking and healthier. Or, of course, to become novas. And it's just possible you can increase your kid's chances of eruption.

Nightlife in Havana hasn't yet reached Ibiza-level on our bacchanal-o-meter, but it's close enough to spit, especially with the recent addition of a Star Lord's Café in the heart of the party district. The recent opening of the club has already caused an increase in the local nova population, because just as with the original location in Manhattan, Star Lord's offers the novas anything they want for free so long as they're willing to mingle with the *hoi polloi*. But there's a difference down here in Cuba, that difference being that most of the novas here are also conducting business while they eat. Hell, the big Dee-Vee might as well set up a branch office at Star Lord's Havana, what with all the elites hanging around. Under the

festive atmosphere and the dancing, most of the novas visiting Havana seem far more interested in making a deal with N! for their life story or making a deal with someone willing to pay top-dollar for their services.

Oh, and for you groupies (and you know who you are): Make no mistake about it, most of the superstars are just passing through Havana, but they seem to pass through a lot more often when there's money to be made. And there is definitely an atmosphere of financial gain in the air here. I mean, is it a coincidence that a certain Middle Eastern... ahem, solicitor was recently seen with Armageddon Jones at the Havana Star Lord's? Maybe, but the fact that Armageddon was later seen trouncing a few of the enemies of that particular state makes it seem less likely. There's money changing hands for all the wrong reasons, and the chances are it will stay that way unless someone decides to clean up the less-than-moral activities in the Sin City.

Which, of course, would be a crying shame.



HAVANNA HISTORY

Introduction

Havana isn't what it used to be. The era when citizens lived in fear of the government are over, replaced by an era when citizens refer to Castro's reign as "the good old days." There are plenty of people who are very happy with the changes in Cuba, but the vast majority are merely eking out a living and hoping they don't get caught in the crossfire. The rich and famous are having a fabulous time, content in the knowledge that they are above the law, but the average person on the streets is worried, with good reason.

Lawlessness is a way of life in Havana. No crime gets punished in the new Sin City unless it risks the revenue of the local powers that be. The Medellín crime cartel may not actually sit in parliament, but they are definitely the people everyone else answers to. Between the Medellín's mundane forces and the elite novias they can call on for reinforcements, no one is in a position to stop them. At least no one who's stepped forward to handle the matter.

Important Data

Havana has changed in the last decade. Since Castro's death, the population of the city has swollen from less than 3 million to almost 10 million in nearly record time. Though there have been concerns over the long-term effects of this population growth, the government to date has simply continued to build in all directions. The new government has the money and the resources, and the constant work ensures that no one who actually tries to make a living is in any danger of starving to death. It shouldn't come as too much of a surprise to discover that even the construction workers are doing fairly well in the salary department; the Medellín learned from the best in organized crime and not only instigated the unions but quickly took control of them.

Most of the people living in Havana are not from Cuba. Despite fairly open relations with the US, Cuba still maintains certain laws that have made the country very popular, including laws against the extradition of criminals. The end result has been a population explosion that has brought some of the most dangerous and violent criminals to the country. That's the bad news. The good news is that most of them are too scared of the local government and the omnipresent elites to be overtly violent. Very few laws are taken seriously by the police in

Havana, but violent crime is not tolerated. Rumors abound that elites working for the Cuban government, the Medellín or both have leave to act as judge, jury and executioner against those who would disturb Havana's social order. Those rumors are true.

Havana's two true laws are supply and demand; anything can be purchased in Havana if the price is right. The cost, however, is often exorbitant for the more unusual demands. The government — or at least the Medellín cronies within the government — is very efficient and businesslike when it comes to handling the more disturbing affairs, but the cost of that efficiency is steep, because there are many wheels to grease within the governmental machine.

Despite the risks of gaining the wrong sort of attention, tourism is remarkably good in Havana. The climate in Cuba is semitropical, with heavy rains throughout the summer and autumn months and temperatures that average around 24 degrees Celsius. But it's not really the climate most people come to the city for; it's the opportunities. As in any place where money exchanges hands in great quantities, there are plenty of chances for people to get rich quick. Between the drug trade, the vice shops, the casinos, the medical clinics that handle blatantly illegal operations and the mercenary trade, a person can easily gain or lose a fortune in Sin City in a matter of days or even hours. It's commonly believed that one in every three tourists has more than relaxation in mind when they come to Cuba. That's a moderate estimate.

History

Fidel Castro's death brought about changes in the capital of Cuba the likes of which haven't been seen since... well, since he first seized power in the country back in 1959. Forty-nine years later, everything old is now new again. In its heyday during the Batista regime, Havana was considered a place of sheer decadence, and after almost six decades of forced abstinence, the old reputation has come back again.

Within weeks of Castro's death, the country was gripped by sporadic fighting and blatant acts of terrorism. While Castro was in power, there was a clear chain of command, but after his death, the people who'd been closest to him suddenly found themselves at war with each other over who would succeed him as the ruler of Cuba.

Given communism's decline throughout the rest of the world, most Cubans assumed that there would be a gradual transition to a free market, but it's safe to say no one expected the return to capitalism to be as fast and furious as it was. No one, that is, except for Marko Valcor. Valcor wasn't a political power, nor was he an entrepreneur out to make a quick buck. He was simply the first of the major Hollywood players to see the advantages of filming a movie in Havana. Even while the US government was trying to work out a deal with the leaders in Cuba, Valcor was signing the papers that allowed him and his film crews to open up shop in the area and passing around cold, hard cash to seal the deal. More importantly, the money he spread around didn't all go into the hands of a few politicians; it went out to the public at large. The rest, as they say, is history. One taste of financial freedom after a lifetime of living in borderline poverty was enough to convince most people that capitalism beat the sin out of communism.

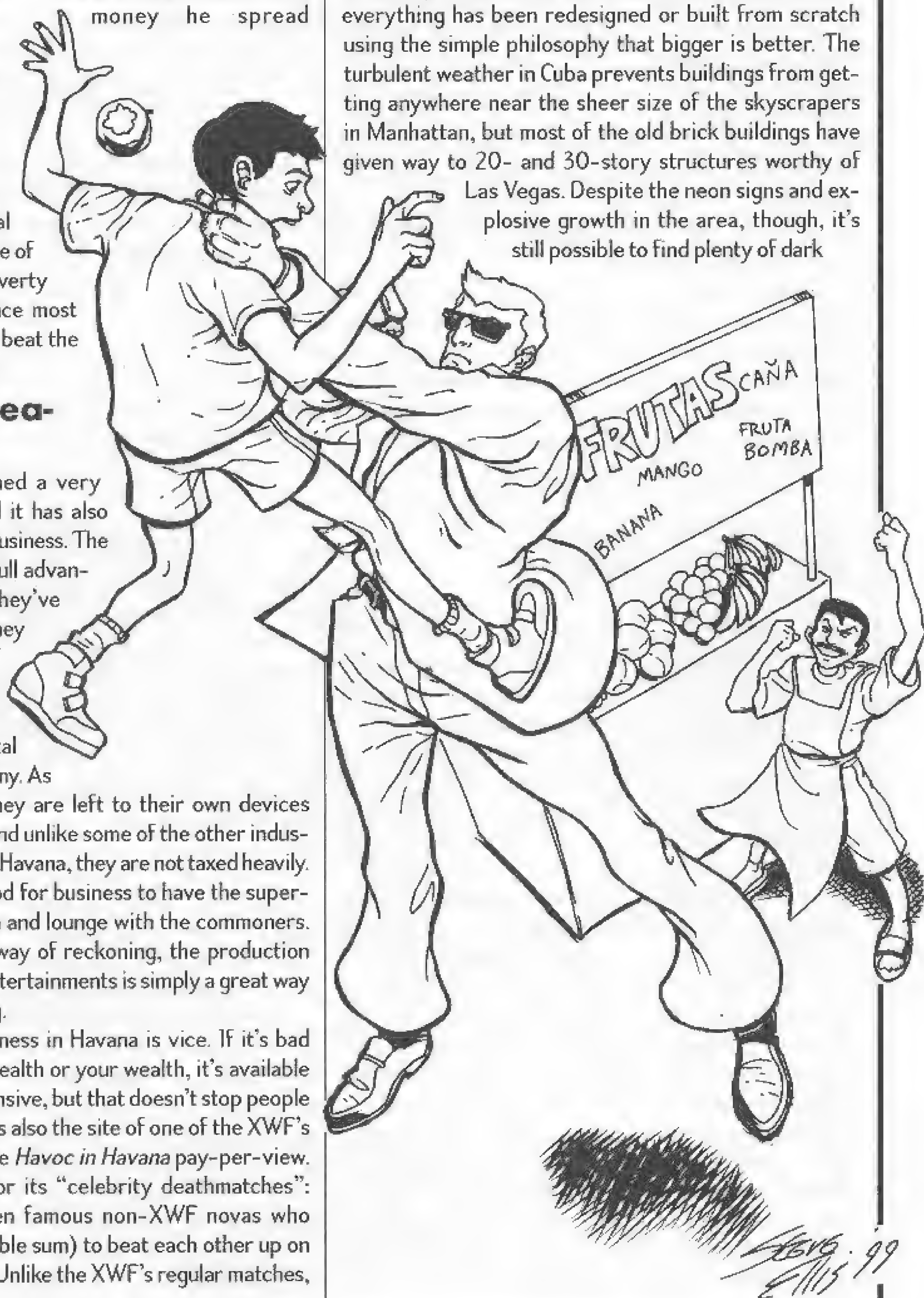
Important Features

Havana has gained a very seedy reputation, and it has also gained a great deal of business. The movie industry takes full advantage of the studios they've built in the area, and they do so with impunity. If not for the studios, there would have been no influx of capital to revitalize the economy. As a sign of gratitude, they are left to their own devices more often than not, and unlike some of the other industries that have come to Havana, they are not taxed heavily. Why? Because it's good for business to have the superstars come to the area and lounge with the commoners. To the government's way of reckoning, the production of movies and other entertainments is simply a great way to get free advertising.

The biggest business in Havana is vice. If it's bad for your wallet, your health or your wealth, it's available and it's probably expensive, but that doesn't stop people from coming. Havana is also the site of one of the XWF's annual supershows, the *Havoc in Havana* pay-per-view. This PPV is known for its "celebrity deathmatches": grudge fights between famous non-XWF novas who agree (for a considerable sum) to beat each other up on global TV and OpNet. Unlike the XWF's regular matches,

most of these specialty matches are staged, but on two separate occasions the fights have even been legitimate combat between celebrity rivals who agreed to "settle their differences in a public forum" (people still talk about the Tombstone vs. El Cuchillo catfight). *Havoc in Havana* is broadcast from a special arena designed to handle the powerful shockwaves and energy discharges that take place. Insurance for spectators costs between 400 and 1,000 pesos depending on the location of the seats in the arena. Most people pay it willingly.

Havana no longer looks anything like it did in the past. Between the bars, casinos and constant construction, very little of the city's old flavor remains. Most everything has been redesigned or built from scratch using the simple philosophy that bigger is better. The turbulent weather in Cuba prevents buildings from getting anywhere near the sheer size of the skyscrapers in Manhattan, but most of the old brick buildings have given way to 20- and 30-story structures worthy of Las Vegas. Despite the neon signs and explosive growth in the area, though, it's still possible to find plenty of dark



alleys and tenements. Some things never change, even in a town where the majority of the buildings are less than five years old.

Far and away the most dangerous aspect of Havana comes in the form of the elites, many of whom use Havana as a safe haven from Utopia's watchdogs. They work for money, and most of them have moral codes best described as "flexible." In addition to hiring themselves as muscle for the highest bidders, certain elites have made deals with the Medellín and the government. Many of Havana's residents resent the *mascaras*, but there is nothing to be done about the situation. One can't really risk angering the novas, especially when many have special dispensation from the local police and the government alike.

Luminaries

La Perra del Sangre

Background: Stephanie Severance takes her nickname ("The Bloodhound" or "The Bloody Bitch," depending on the tone) in stride. If the people feel she deserves a title for handling certain of Cuba's darker affairs of state, she can forgive them. Contrary to most beliefs about La Perra, she is not an indiscriminate killer. It's extremely rare for her to get personally involved enough in any investigation to take the law into her own hands. But she can if she chooses to, and everyone with half a grain of sense knows it.

Stephanie, a B-movie actress, came to Havana when Marko Valcor made his big move, hoping to kick her career into high gear. Instead, her M-R node kicked in, courtesy of an insider party and a noseful of PCP-cut coke. Her eruption was seen by everyone at the party, which brought her immediate fame and caused a few problems as the heat flash that came with the eruption caused heavy property damage and left two bystanders severely burned. Her initial job was merely to be seen, to associate with all the right people and make sure that the rich and famous enjoyed themselves. But somewhere along the way she started listening to the information people shared when she was around, and she got the idea to start taking notes and dealing out her own form of insurance. Rather than give in to the temptation to use simple blackmail, Stephanie chose to share the secrets she learned with the Medellín. They, in turn, rewarded her loyalty with money and a position within the secret police of Havana. She took to the job like a professional and soon managed to have control over the entire operation. These days, the Bloodhound has enough



dirt on most of the important people in Havana to get them into deep trouble and a reputation that makes J. Edgar Hoover seem tame. The Bloodhound is the heart of the government's covert actions operations, and she uses that position to her greatest advantage.

Description: La Perra is a pretty girl with the stance and confidence of a Gestapo leader. Her long black hair is normally kept in a severe ponytail, and the frilly clothes she wore when she was younger have been replaced by a series of tailor-made business suits. She seldom makes public appearances, preferring to let her reputation grow more impressive and to blur the reality of what she looks like. Most of her time is spent studying the information she and her network of informants gather and honing her abilities. The fact that she can alter her appearance, combined with her innate savvy, makes her the perfect person to handle her job.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 5, Charisma 3

Abilities: Brawl 2, Command 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Performance 3, Streetwise 4, Style 4, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Followers 5, Resources 3, Attunement 5

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Perception • (Analytic Taste/ Touch), Mega-Appearance •• (Mr. Nobody)

Quantum Powers: Armor •••, Bodymorph •• (Fire), Quantum Bolt •, Flight •



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us

From the N! Channel's
special, *Team Tomorrow:
Look How They've Grown*

It's fair to say that Team Tomorrow always expected to reach grand heights, but most people will admit they never expected the "heroes of the future" to expand as far as they have.

From rather simple beginnings, T2M has grown into a franchise large enough to need four separate bases of operation. They've done things that most of us can only imagine, and they've averted countless disasters. The last 10 years have seen significant changes take place across the world, and Team Tomorrow has been a big part of that startling transformation. But perhaps the most amazing thing about this team of novas is that they do not acknowledge themselves as citizens of any country but, rather, citizens of the world. They are leading by example, and in the process, they have changed the perceptions of an entire planet.

We're in Venice today, home base for Team Tomorrow Europe. Though there are tensions in the air, there's no doubt in anyone's mind that history is in the making. There's a revolutionary idea being considered here, a chance to shift the way the world works and to break down borders that have existed for hundreds or in some cases thousands of years. The most powerful officials in Europe are considering today what would have been impossible even a decade ago: They are considering the idea of a United Europe.

Can you imagine the changes that could come from this meeting? Germany, France, Greece and all of the other countries of the Old World could cease to exist as they do today, becoming a unified force. Borders will collapse, to be replaced by a single government that regulates the economy of one of the greatest world powers ever seen. While it might be excessive to say that Project Utopia alone is responsible for this possibility, it wouldn't be a stretch to say T2M has led by example and shown the world leaders the way to a perfect — or at least a better — tomorrow.

But resistance to the idea is rife. Many nations fear the loss of identity that such a radical reshaping of the political structure on the continent could cause. The changes in monetary balances alone would certainly shake the foundations of world finance. The shifting of technologies and governmental powers could bring about a better world or cause economic upheaval substantial enough to ruin some major industries in Europe.

Even more grim than the doomsayers who predict economic catastrophe are the sociologists who insist the change from traditional, separatist governments to one unified mega-nation would cause social upheaval. Many point to the United States of America as a model of how the unified Europe could conceivably work, but others scoff at the notion, convinced that such radical changes would lead to chaos and even to civil war.

Project Utopia does not agree. Despite religious differences, nationalities that have been in conflict for generations and even racial differences, T2M has thrived. In the words of Byron Graham, the nova known far and wide as The Saxon, "There's nothing that we, as citizens of the world, can't overcome if we put our minds to it." No voices within T2M were raised in protest to the words, though a few other team members certainly added their applause to that given by the Utopian Council for a Unified Europe.

Though the meetings here are only starting, there is a strong sense of anticipation in the air. But the question remains as to whether the end result of that anticipation will be the creation of a better world or merely the elimination of all the goodwill generated by Team Tomorrow over the last decade. The meetings here have only begun, and it is far too early in the summit for anyone to guess what might come from it.

VENICE HISTORY

Introduction

Venice has become a political hotbed. The presence of Team Tomorrow's European Headquarters alone might have been enough to ensure the intrigues of the city, but Utopia also has its European base of operations there. Utopia is considered a force for good by a great number of people, but many dissidents choose to disagree — sometimes violently.

For all the good that Utopia and T2M have accomplished, many fear that they might be overreaching their boundaries, pushing for a unified Europe too soon, and that the results could be devastating. Still, the city has been a magnet for attention ever since the European branch of Team Tomorrow settled on Venice for its headquarters, and the media has come to love the city for both its austere beauty and the endless political entanglements found in the area.

Team Tomorrow has been an economic boon for Venice, which has long thrived on tourism as its pri-

mary source of income. T2M has been seen by some as a bane on the city. Every deed performed by Team Tomorrow has brought attention to the area, and that attention has caused massive urban sprawl in an area where population growth has always been problematic. It has also brought unwanted attention from groups such as the Teragen.

Important Data

Venice is built on a series of over 120 islands, a city that has canals where roads would be in most metropolises. The city was suffering from extreme overcrowding until Team Tomorrow rectified the matter: Several large artificial islands have been added to the city, stretching into the Adriatic Sea and relieving the burden on the original city. Nuova Venezia, the man-made islands which remain separate from Old Venice, has taken on the burdens of the increase in population and the explosion in tourism. Most of the old city remains unchanged, but the



new city is a constantly shifting maze of buildings, some of which are beginning to block the view of the sea from the ancient seaport. The average temperature for the year is around 20 degrees Celsius but rises sharply in the summer months and plummets by roughly -7 degrees in the winter. The land is susceptible to floods, which have caused no end of trouble to the city over the years.

On the brighter side, the new islands were designed with multiple purposes, one of which was to ensure that Venice proper would no longer suffer as heavily from flooding. The art museums that occupy so much of Old Venice are now safer than they have been in the past, and increased revenues from Team Tomorrow's and Utopia's presences have increased the living standards of most Venetians substantially. Tourism remains the number-one business in Venice, and no one can claim that T2M has done anything but boost the number of people travelling to the area.

Despite all the good that Team Tomorrow has done, a list of deeds that no one with any sense denies, there are still several active and outspoken groups which would rather see Utopia and T2M leave the vicinity entirely. Not all of them are polite about their requests, but none of them have been too stupid about how they state their opinions either. The most vocal opponent is la Società Storica di Venezia, which believes the mere presence of the organization causes irreparable damage to the city's traditions, and which has been crying foul ever since Nuova Venezia became a reality. The fact that the new islands have already spared the city from several of the regular floods that once caused no end of grief to Venice is pointedly ignored.

History

Team Tomorrow's European branch established Venice as its headquarters on April 20, 2002. Within months, the city became overcrowded with people wanting to see the nova team in action. The local government passed strong new regulations restricting the construction of new buildings and effectively forbade the existing hotels and entertainment centers from expanding after only a few weeks. By that point, several entrepreneurs had already begun making plans that would have all but completely altered the city. There were numerous formal protests, and despite the best intentions, the situation was growing tense and ugly. Three months after moving into the area, Team Tomorrow began work on the new islands half a kilometer out to sea. Within a year, the islands spread most of the way to the area of Old Venice, and portions of the artificial islands were being purchased or leased for the purpose of building new resorts and establishing broadcasting stations. Nuova Venezia was born.

While Venice and its new sister city have not become the official base of operations for Europe's governments, most European countries established embassies on the new islands in an effort to make sure that both Utopia and Team Tomorrow were available for consultation and dealing with emergencies. In many ways, Nuova Venezia has become a smaller version of the United Nations. Even the US and Canada eventually established satellite embassies in Nuova Venezia, both for convenience and to make sure their voices were heard at the "Utopian Summits" which occur frequently on the islands. Old Venice maintains a population of around 310,000 full-time residents. Nuova Venezia already exceeds that number, recently surpassing the half million mark.

Three separate incidents of terrorism in the area have been linked to Utopian presence, all of which were quickly quelled by T2M, and none of which involved novas. Most Venetians hold terrorism in the same regard that Californians hold earthquakes. It's inevitable that it will occur at some point. Meanwhile, it's business as usual.

Important Features

Venice proper remains mostly unaltered despite the changes in the area around it. The hotels and restaurants, museums and theaters continue much as they always have. But Nuova Venezia has become something completely unexpected. It has become a city in its own right and a center of industry. N! has a satellite office here, as do most of the major networks on OpNet.

Almost despite the original intentions, Nuova Venezia has become a city with its own personality and driving forces. In both cases the main ingredient seems to be greed, but looks can be deceiving. While there is a handsome profit to be made by those in control of the new islands — which officially belong to the city of Venice — most of the business conducted in the area has to do with matters of global significance. There are companies practically lined up to rent space in one of the numerous buildings going up on the islands, and as the demand continues, there are even a few people talking about adding still more land to what has already been built. Team Tomorrow is wisely staying quiet on the subject.

Team Tomorrow's headquarters is divided, with the public offices on Nuova Venezia and the private, secluded meeting areas in the old city. The main HQ is massive, covering practically an entire city block, and contains offices for Utopia and for the personnel that keep T2M operating smoothly. The largest part of the facility is the training arena, where members of the team can practice and potential members can show what they're capable of in relative seclusion. With rare exceptions, this area is off limits to non-novas for safety reasons. T2M makes most of

its announcements from the connecting meeting hall, which is set up to accommodate the press.

The second largest area is the research and development wing of T2M, where novas and a select band of baseline specialists try to solve some of the continuing problems in the medical field and on the ecological front. Numerous claims and rumors about darker plans and experiments have become a point of high speculation in the tabloid press, but the proof is in the pudding: Virtually all of the labs have had visitors from the media at one point or another. Despite whatever claims might come around, few ever take them seriously when they look at T2M's track record.

ers saved her and almost three dozen students in the class with her. Uta is one of the founding members of Team Tomorrow Europe and one of its most vocal members as well. For the most part, people listen when she speaks: Anyone who can create the islands of Nuova Venezia or raise a mountain at will commands a certain amount of respect, but it's her contributions to ecological restoration that have won her the most regard. Uta is quite capable of destruction but prefers to use her powers in different ways, such as diverting natural disasters and restoring the proper balance of nutrients in soils to ensure a good crop.

Description: Uta is a short, athletic woman with dark brown hair and slate gray eyes. Her hair is normally tied into a ponytail, and for the most part, she prefers to dress in what she refers to as "civilian" clothing. She is constantly in motion, seems almost incapable of standing still and tends to chat about anything and everything. Her most passionate discussions normally involve the best ways to improve the quality of living for the impoverished or the cultivation of precious gemstones.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 2, Command 3, Computer 2, Drive 2, Endurance 4, Engineering 3, Etiquette 3, Finance 3, Firearms 1, Interrogation 2, Intimidation 2, Intrusion 2, Investigation 1, Legerdemain 2, Linguistics 4 (German, English, Greek, Italian, Spanish), Martial Arts 2, Medicine 1, Melee 2, Resistance 4, Science 4, Style 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Attunement 1, Backing 5, Cipher 1, Contacts 3, Dormancy 4, Influence 4, Resources 3

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 8, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence • (Enhanced Memory, Engineering Prodigy)

Quantum Powers: Elemental Mastery (Earth) ••••• (Crush, Imprison, Shaping — as per Elemental Anima, Shield, Storm)



Luminaries

Uta "Tremor" Stentz

Background: Uta was born in Germany and moved throughout Europe with her family. Like her father before her, she trained to be a geologist. Unlike her father, her passion for the mysteries held within the earth almost killed her when she was buried alive during a mudslide. The eruption of her pow-

CITIES: LAGOS, NIGERIA

From the exclusive *Harold Matthers Presents* interview with Alafin Sango, aired January 17, 2008 on NewsNet:



HM: IT'S FAIR TO SAY YOU HAVEN'T MADE ANY FRIENDS WITH SOME OF YOUR ACTIONS. MOST OF YOUR NEIGHBORS CLAIM THAT YOU'VE DESTROYED THEIR ECONOMIES, THE UN HAS THREATENED SEVERAL SANCTIONS AGAINST YOU, AND PROJECT UTOPIA CLAIMS YOU'VE DONE EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO DISRUPT ITS EFFORTS FOR WORLD PEACE, YET YOU SEEM UNAFFECTED BY THESE ACCUSATIONS....

AS: I WOULD ONLY WORRY ABOUT THE CHARGES IF THEY WERE BASED IN FACT. I HAVE DONE NOTHING TO MY NEIGHBORS EXCEPT PROVE THAT I AM A COMPETENT LEADER. IN FACT, IT WAS MARUKAM THAT STARTED THE CONFLICT WITH ME WHICH ONLY ENDED WHEN I TOOK CONTROL OF ITS LAND AND DISPOSED OF THAT DESPOT MORANAHIL. I DID NOTHING TO PROVOKE THEM.



AS: THE UNITED NATIONS FEELS THEY AREN'T ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING IF THEY DO NOT THREATEN SOMEBODY WITH SANCTIONS. I AM MERELY THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE OF REFORMERS THEY'VE THREATENED OVER THE YEARS. AS FOR THE CHARGES THAT I TOOK MONEY FROM UTOPIA FOR MY OWN GOALS, THEY ARE NONSENSE. I TOOK THE MONEY THAT THEY OFFERED ME AND MADE MY COUNTRY A BETTER PLACE FOR MY PEOPLE. FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, IT TOOK OVER 20 NAIRA TO EQUAL ONE US DOLLAR. NOW LOOK AT THE ECONOMY: THE NAIRA AND THE DOLLAR ARE NEARLY EQUAL IN VALUE. I AM SUPPOSED TO FEEL BAD ABOUT THIS? FOR WHAT?



HM: THERE ARE AN AWFUL LOT OF PEOPLE WHO CLAIM THAT YOU USED THE MONEY STRICTLY FOR WEAPONS PURCHASES AND TO LINE YOUR OWN POCKETS....

AS: I AM NOT A WEALTHY MAN. I HAVE ENOUGH TO LIVE COMFORTABLY, NO MORE, AND I HAVE THAT BECAUSE I HAVE INVESTED IN THE FUTURE OF NIGERIA. DID I BUY WEAPONS? NATURALLY. MY COUNTRY MUST BE STRONG, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF THE NOVAS USED BY THE UN FORCES AND PROJECT UTOPIA ALIKE TO ENFORCE THEIR WILL UPON THE WORLD. THESE DAYS I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY THAT SOME MANIAC LIKE TOTENTANZ WILL COME HERE AND DECLARE HIMSELF A GOD OR A RULER. I HAVE THE FORCES AND POWER TO DEFEND MY PEOPLE.



HM: HAVE NOVAS BEEN AN ISSUE FOR YOU IN THE PAST?

AS: NO, NOT AS YET, BUT THEY COULD BE. WOULD THE US STAND BY AND LET ANOTHER COUNTRY DEVELOP DEVASTATING WEAPONS AGAINST WHICH THEY HAD NO DEFENSE? OF COURSE NOT! NEITHER WOULD I, AND SINCE I CAN DEVELOP THE TECHNOLOGY, I CHOOSE TO DO SO.



HM: WHAT ABOUT THE CLAIMS THAT YOU ARE SELLING PROHIBITED TECHNOLOGIES TO OTHER COUNTRIES?

AS: SOMEBODY HAS MISTAKEN NIGERIA FOR THE JAPANESE GANGSTERS. I DO NOT DEAL IN ILLEGAL WEAPONS. IF I HAVE DEVICES TO PROTECT MY OWN COUNTRY, THAT IS ONE THING, BUT WHY WOULD I THEN SELL THOSE WEAPONS TO ANOTHER WHO COULD BE MY ENEMY? NO, THESE ARE UGLY RUMORS STARTED BY UTOPIA.



HM: WHAT WOULD PROJECT UTOPIA HOPE TO GAIN BY SPREADING THESE RUMORS?

AS: POPULAR OPINION, THEY HOPE TO MAKE ME LOOK LIKE A MONSTER, IN THE BELIEF THAT THEY CAN THEN OVERTHROW ME WITHOUT REGARD FOR THE LAWS OF THE WORLD AROUND US.



HM: BUT THE QUESTION COMES BACK AGAIN, WHY?

AS: THEY HAVE BEEN OFFENDED BY MY UNWILLINGNESS TO LET THEM RUN MY COUNTRY AS THEY ARE RUNNING SO MANY OTHERS.

HM: WHICH COUNTRIES DOES UTOPIA RUN?

AS: ALL THOSE AFFILIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS. THEY HAVE CONTROL OVER CHINA, THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN, ALL OF EUROPE... ALL OF THEM.



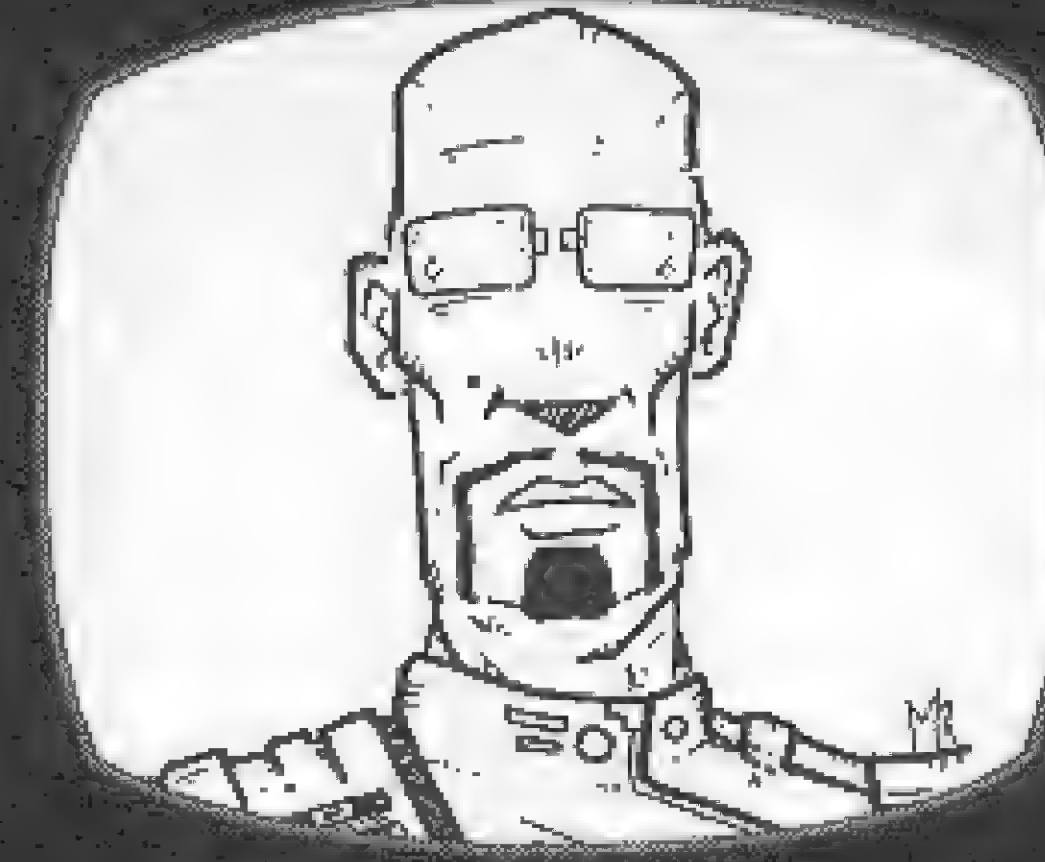
HM: WHICH LEAVES NIGERIA WHERE?

AS: ALONE. WE ARE A FORTRESS AGAINST THE SORT OF DOMINATION UTOPIA WANTS TO HAVE. WE HAVE OUR OWN MINDS AND BELIEFS, WHICH WE WILL FOLLOW, NO MATTER WHAT THE COST.



HM: DO YOU THINK THE COST OF SUCH FREEDOM IS HIGH? MAYBE EVEN TOO HIGH TO CONTINUE TO PAY?

AS: FREEDOM ALWAYS COMES WITH A COST! HOW CAN ANYONE BELIEVE OTHERWISE? THERE IS ALMOST ALWAYS A LOSS OF LIFE, AND THERE IS CERTAINLY A LOSS OF POPULARITY.



HM: WHAT ABOUT THE ACCUSATIONS THAT YOU'VE BEGUN GENETIC SCREENINGS AND PURGES IN YOUR COUNTRY?

AS: MORE NONSENSE! LOOK AROUND YOU. YOU ARE IN THE HEART OF LAGOS, THE CAPITAL OF MY COUNTRY. DO YOU SEE ANYONE WHO ISN'T HAPPY? WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY REDUCED THE CRIME RATE TO ALMOST NOTHING, WE HAVE ELIMINATED POVERTY WITHIN THE WHOLE OF NIGERIA, THE STANDARD OF LIVING HERE IS VERY HIGH, AS YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE, AND NOWHERE ARE THERE ANY MASS GRAVES OR OVENS FOR DESTROYING BODIES. IT'S COMPLETE NONSENSE, ONCE AGAIN GENERATED BY UTOPIA TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM WANTING TO DEAL WITH NIGERIA.



HM: WOULD IT BE EASIER JUST TO DEAL WITH UTOPIA AND THEIR AGENDAS?

AS: MUCH EASIER, YES. BUT MY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN OPPRESSED BEFORE, AND I CANNOT ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN SO LONG AS I DRAW BREATH. I HAVE FORBIDDEN THE NOVAS IN NIGERIA TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH UTOPIA OR THEIR TEAM TOMORROW. THEY ARE EXPECTED TO DEFEND THIS COUNTRY FROM INVADERS AND, IN EXCHANGE, THEY ARE TREATED AS WELL AS ANYONE ELSE, ANYWHERE ELSE.



HM: HOW MANY NOVAS ARE THERE IN NIGERIA?

AS: THAT IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY. UTOPIA WOULD LIKE TO KNOW HOW MANY NOVAS THERE ARE, SO THAT THEY COULD PREPARE A PROPER FORCE OF THEIR OWN ABERRANTS FOR INVASION.



HM: YOU HAVE NOVAS, BUT WHEN YOU MENTION THE NOVAS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, YOU REFER TO THEM AS ABERRANTS. WHY IS THAT?

AS: BECAUSE THE ABERRANTS OF THE OTHER COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE WORKING FOR UTOPIA, ARE A THREAT. TO CALL THEM NOVAS WOULD BE TO HUMANIZE THEM, AND I CHOOSE NOT TO SEE MY ENEMIES AS HUMAN. I WOULD FEEL POORLY IF I HAD TO TAKE ANOTHER HUMAN LIFE, EVEN ONE THAT MEANT TO HARM MY PEOPLE OR MYSELF.



HM: ARE YOU A PEACEFUL MAN, PRESIDENT SANGO?

AS: OH YES. I MUCH PREFER THE IDEA THAT EVERYONE GET ALONG IN PEACE. I WISH NO ONE ILL WILL.

HM: NOT EVEN UTOPIA?

AS: NOT EVEN UTOPIA.



HM: DO YOU SEE ANY WAY AROUND A CONFLICT WITH UTOPIA? DO YOU SEE ANY WAY IN WHICH PEACE COULD STILL BE ACHIEVED?

AS: UTOPIA WOULD HAVE TO MAKE THE FIRST OVERTURES TOWARD PEACE. I HAVE ALREADY MADE SEVERAL THAT THEY HAVE IGNORED.



HM: DO YOU THINK UTOPIA HAS BEEN UNKIND TO YOU?

AS: NO. I THINK THEY HAVE BEEN DELIBERATELY MALICIOUS. I THINK THEY WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO SEE ME DEAD OR DEPOSED AND TO HAVE THEIR OWN PUPPET LEADER ON THE THRONE.

HM: THEN WHY HAVEN'T THEY TAKEN ANY OVERT ACTIONS AGAINST YOU AS YET?

AS: THEY WILL. THEY WILL ACT SOON. AND I WILL BE READY FOR THEM.

LAGOS HISTORY

Introduction

Lagos is practically the city of tomorrow. The people there are happy, the children are well cared for and receive excellent schooling. There are very few citizens of Nigeria who have much to complain about. Technologically speaking, the country has made more progress in the last five years than any other location in the world, save Addis Ababa. Why? Because of Alafin Sango.

Sango is not a popular man in the global community. He has blatantly ignored the rules and ideals of Project Utopia, continuously disregarded attempts to compromise and accused the world at large of trying to ruin him and his country alike. There are detractors on all sides of him, people who would gladly see him deposed or far worse, and many would like to wield the weapon that takes his life.

He has warred with his neighbors, destroyed entire towns and populations, allegedly used proscribed technology in conflicts with his enemies and even been accused of attempted genocide on those he considers a threat.

While unemployment is down in Nigeria, the practice of deporting or imprisoning "unwanted loiterers and dissidents" is far likelier the reason than any sweeping changes in the economy. Rumor has it that the ones deported, even the citizens of Nigeria, are the lucky ones. Unlike most of the major cities in the world, the population of Lagos has actually gotten smaller since the coming of the novas. Though not by a substantial amount, it's noticeable just the same.

But in Nigeria proper, Sango is a hero. Very few Nigerians wish him harm — or admit to their desires at any rate — and most consider him the best thing that ever happened. In a country that has remained "Third World" for most of its modern existence, Sango is considered a godsend. Most of his claims are absolutely true: Crime is down, health and education programs have removed the burdens from most of the citizens' lives and the quality of living is at an all-time high. Longstanding conflicts between Nigeria's Ibo and Yoruba peoples have been put aside, at least for the present. Jobs are plentiful, and those who cannot get jobs are trained for work. Granted, most of those trained are enlisted in the military, but they still have employment. If Sango is a dictator, he is a benevolent one in the eyes of his people.

The problem is less with his goals and ambitions and more with what he has done to achieve them. Nigeria is now considered a dangerous place to be a stranger. There are police on every corner, most of them military, and there are areas of the city where foreigners are not allowed to visit. Lagos in particular has become a police state. The term "Big Brother is watching you" has once again come into vogue, and most of the people saying it are referring to Nigeria when they speak. Everyone in Lagos must carry travel papers, whether they are living in the city or merely passing through.

The leaps in technology, most of which are considered controversial, have been a boon to Nigeria, but a curse to almost everyone around it. The tanks, planes and weapons of Nigeria are state of the art and far more powerful for their size than most other countries have managed. Nigeria's weapons are powerful and patently against the Utopian charters. Sango couldn't care less. He knows his borders are safe. And there are, indeed, several weapons capable of taking down a nova once and for all. Contrary to the majority of rumors, Sango is not dealing these weapons out to other countries, not even the ones that offer a great deal of monetary compensation. But someone is. Somebody is making a very tidy profit, and Sango would dearly love to know who is responsible.

Important Data

Without doubt, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa. The 1996 UN census estimated the population of the country at just over 126,929,000 people. The law of averages dictates that one in a million of those people is a nova. No one outside of Nigeria has any idea just how many novas there are in the country, but not too many people are willing to find out the hard way.

Over 50% of the population in Nigeria lives in the cities, and Lagos is by far the largest city in the nation, with a population of just over 4,374,000, a very heavy population increase in the last twenty years. Other major cities include Aba, Abeokuta, Abuja, Ado Ekiti, Ede, Enugu, Ibadan, Iwo, Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri, Mushin, Ogbomosho, Onitsha, Oshogbo, Port Harcourt and Zaria. The capital of Nigeria was moved to Abuja in the late '90s, but Sango had it moved back when he took control of the country. Outside of the cities, there are several radical changes in Nigeria, the largest of which is the

farming conclaves. The conclaves are mostly automated and produce tremendous amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables, enough to keep Nigeria completely self-reliant.

There are great supplies of iron ore, petroleum, coal and various industrial metals in Nigeria, as well as a steady supply of silicon. Nigeria has become very self-sufficient.

The vast majority of the national population belong to one of four separate tribes of people. Only a very small number of Caucasians live in Nigeria, most having fled the country soon after Sango took control. There is a very solid educational system in the country as well as several major theatres and museums. What is absent from Nigeria is a large number of bars or clubs. Also, OpNet is monitored, and all information coming into Nigeria goes through a series of specially designed filters before coming into the homes of the Nigerian people. While movies and entertainment make it into the country, most news programs are deleted before leaving the Ministry of Information established by Sango within a year of overthrowing the previous government. Most of the industries in Nigeria revolve around military strength and the betterment of life within the country. Religion, though tolerated, is portrayed as a dangerous indulgence. As evidence that religion is bad, the Ministry of Information often shows programs concerning the more violent aspects of organized religion in other countries, with special emphasis on the nova-driven religions.

Weather in Nigeria is predictable: The southern extremes are hot and humid with heavy rainfall, and the northern regions farther from the coast are dry and usually warm.

Novas are not being driven from Nigeria, though there have been many rumors to that effect. They are, however, being watched closely. Sango has made it very clear to every nova located that their families' welfare depends on the novas behaving themselves properly. To prove that he means no harm by his threats, he provides the novas and their families with lavish living quarters in Lagos. They are expected to defend Nigeria from any attacks, and most seem ready to comply. Naturally, there are a few dissidents, such as Sirocco, who walked into the desert and has only been seen on rare occasions when he felt the Nigerian dictator was overstepping his bounds. Though there have been many vocal confrontations, no one has yet decided to actually do anything about the nova. His control over hurricane-force winds and sandstorms has made him a bit too dangerous to make the wrong move against.

History

Nigeria went through a very turbulent period after the first novas showed themselves. Several factions began using novas to make themselves heard when the government ignored their requests for social changes. To make matters worse, the neighboring countries began squabbling over borders and using novas to make their points clear as well. It wasn't long before the entire region began

warring. Despite attempts by Nigeria to stay out of the fighting, it was impossible. Two novas caused monumental damage to the capital city of Abuja with their fighting, killing hundreds in the process. Among the dead was the leader of the nation and most of his inner council.

And in record time, a military general with enough firepower to assuage the masses fears of outside aggressors made his bid for power. General Alafin Sango



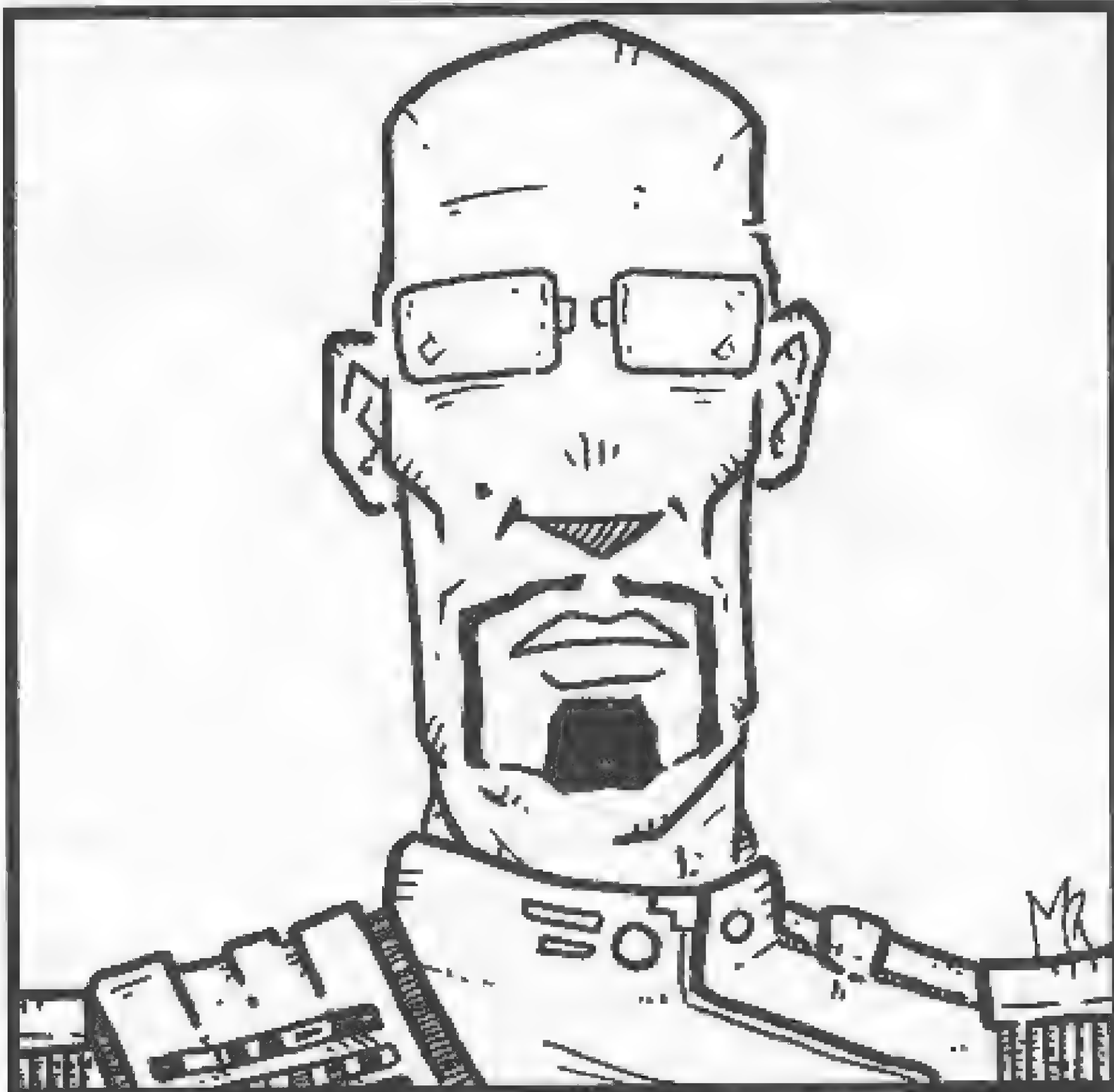
brought down all of his opposition in a matter of weeks and began forcing order on a nation that was in a state of deadly chaos. Sango did not play nicely: Anyone who opposed him was killed on the spot, and he never hesitated to let people know that the killings would continue as long as he deemed them necessary.

Even after his victory, there were complaints from the United Nations and from Utopia. It took three years of continued peace and two democratic elections before Sango was recognized as the official ruler of the country. Not long after that, Utopia offered technological and financial aid to the nation and Sango accepted. Within a year, he had taken the offered assistance and used it to start his new army and purchase the new weapons that have marked him as a monster in the eyes of the neighboring countries. The newly formed nation of Marukam was the first to come to grips with Sango's new outlook on outsiders. King Tomas Moranahil of Marukam made the mistake of trying to seize a portion of Nigeria, claiming that the land rightly belonged to his nation. The end result was the loss of both the king and his country. Marukam lasted only one year before becoming a part of Nigeria. Suddenly the world was noticing Nigeria and her leader, and what they saw scared the hell out of them.

Important Features

Lagos is the definitive capital of Nigeria, both culturally and in importance to the nation. Though many countries, the US included, have banned flights to Nigeria, Lagos sports a state-of-the-art airport — radically better than the one that existed before Sango took control — and has regular flights coming and going from several European countries, China and Japan. While Utopia is publicly against anyone doing business with Sango, they acknowledge that the individual nations have the right to decide for themselves. A great deal of the business done in Lagos is shady, but there is still a legitimate import and export business doing quite well in Nigeria. Most of what is imported is medical supplies; most of what is exported is foodstuffs.

Lagos is a city shrouded in secrets. No one outside of the dictator and a select few of his council members have any idea of just how many novas live in the country or just how many of them are on good terms with their ruler. However, it is known that there are several sections of the city that are flat-out forbidden to anyone who is not a part of the government. Naturally, most of these areas are heavily industrialized and are doing the same sort of research as that done in New York, Tokyo and a few other high-tech cities. The major difference so far is that the technologies being created are almost without exception military in nature. Utopia wants to know what is going on in Lagos's forbidden territories, but no one they've sent in has come back to make a report. Sango denies any knowledge of foreigners disappearing in his capital.



Luminaries

Alafin Sango

Background: Sango is a shrewd, ruthless man with no intention of letting anyone tell him how to run his country. Despite numerous rumors about him, he is not a nova, nor is he a religious zealot. He is merely determined that his country be run in a certain way, his way. While most of the world looks upon Alafin Sango as a monster, his own people see him as their savior. In a time when the rest of Africa was burning and falling apart, he held the nation together and made it stronger than it was before. At 55 years of age, the man who started off his military career as a grunt in the army has become the leader of his nation and the terror of Africa.

Description: Sango is a charismatic leader, handsome if slightly portly, with a friendly smile and a shrewd mind. He makes regular appearances on television in his country and has complete control of the media. Any delusions about freedom of speech were crushed quickly and mercilessly within weeks of his taking over the country. But there is no doubt in the minds of most of the citizens of Nigeria that he does what he must to keep the nation strong. Though his actions sometimes seem harsh, most tend to look at them as the necessary evils that come with being a good leader. Those who disagree do so in silence or from beyond the grave. Sango dresses in military uniforms, though he no longer answers to the title of general. He is the president of the country and never lets anyone forget that fact.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 5, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 3 (Geopolitics), Athletics 1, Arts 2, Biz 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 3, Command 5, Computer 1, Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Interrogation

4, Intimidation 4, Intrusion 1, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2 (Hausa, English, Yoruba), Melee 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 5, Followers 5, Influence 5, Resources 5
Willpower 8

Sirocco

Background: There was a time when Menhi Manubi and Alafin Sango were the best of friends. That was back when both of them were merely soldiers, before Menhi's powers erupted and he became an overnight hero to the people of Nigeria. Menhi was lost in the desert when his powers came to fruition, and by the time he'd found his way back to the rest of the world, he had discovered how to control his powers well enough to avoid harming anyone else.

Menhi suspected his powers were divine in origin; he was, after all, a righteous man in the eyes of Allah. His blood brother Sango did not see things the same way. Sango was very vocal about his distaste for the changes

in his friend and drove a wedge between them. Still, they were in the army together and had to tolerate each other. When the wars and riots started up, it was Menhi, now called "Sirocco" by the press, who stopped invading elites from completely destroying the capital. There were lives lost in the process, but he managed to stop the invaders from leveling the city, and that was something at least. Sango didn't see it that way. He called his friend a demon and cursed him for a murderer. Shamed and wounded by the accusations, Menhi left. He only returns sporadically, checking on what Sango has done to the country. At the present time, he remains uncertain about his lifelong friend's actions. There has been a great deal of good accomplished but also a great deal of harm caused in the process. Until he decides one way or the other, Sirocco remains in the desert, honing his powers and sharpening his skills.

Description: Sirocco is absolutely unremarkable from a distance. He dresses in civilian clothing and carries himself like a soldier. He is graying at the temples, but his face is still very youthful. He is tall and thin, with very dark skin. But when he decides to take control of the winds, he is a different creature entirely. His eyes flash with light, and his skin ripples like sand in a breeze. There is no doubting his power once he decided to make his presence known.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

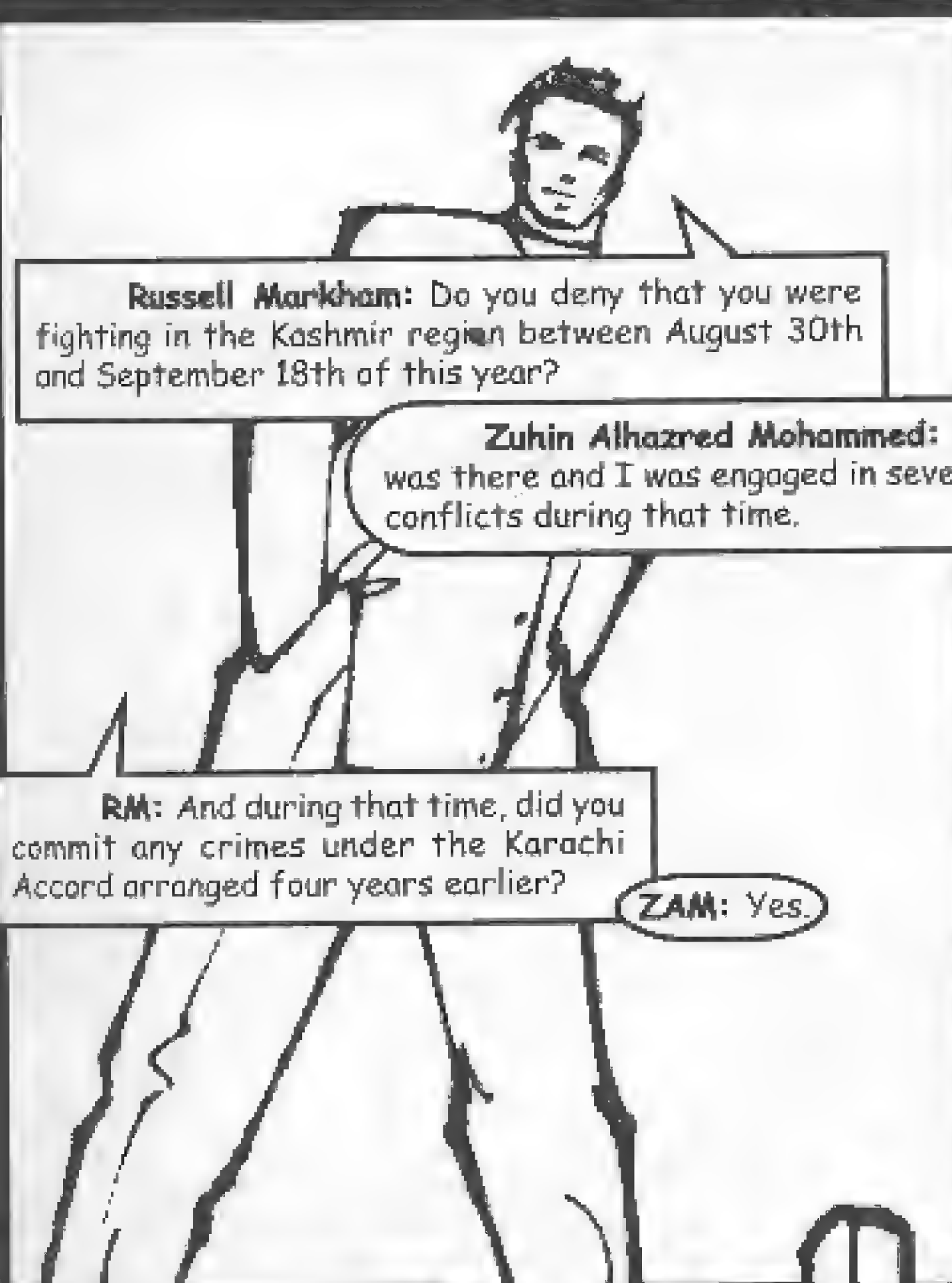
Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Command 3, Endurance 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Legerdemain 1, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 1, Meditation 4, Melee 2, Resistance 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Attunement 3, Cipher 2, Dormancy 3, Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 6, Taint 5 (Glowing Eyes, Shifting Skin)

Mega-Attributes: None

Quantum Powers: Armor •, Elemental Mastery (Air) •••• (Crush, Lethal Blast, Shield, Storm), Flight •••





Russell Markham: Do you deny that you were fighting in the Kashmir region between August 30th and September 18th of this year?

Zuhin Alhazred Mohammed: No, I was there and I was engaged in several conflicts during that time.

RM: And during that time, did you commit any crimes under the Karachi Accord arranged four years earlier?

ZAM: Yes.

And didn't you think that the forces established by the United Nations could handle the matter?

It's my belief that they were either too scared to act or were paid in advance to ignore the incident.

(Pause for commotion to stop)

Are you saying that Team Tomorrow and the United Nations Peacekeeping forces were bought off?

They took no action to stop the invading Chinese forces from trying to seize power in the area. For all I know they were under orders not to act.

So you decided to take international law into your own hands?

No. The Pakistani government asked myself and three others to intervene on its behalf. But it waited almost 48 hours before taking that action. In that time neither the United Nations nor Team Tomorrow took any action.

I see... and did you think it was wise to deploy nova operatives against the Chinese forces?

It seemed likely at the time that fewer of the Pakistani troops would be injured if the novas went in first. All four operatives, myself included, were impervious to regular firearms.

Exactly what crimes did you commit, sir?

Assault with intent to kill, terrorist activities, blatant attempts to overthrow the puppet leadership of the United Nations and Project Utopia.

You admit this freely?

No one could get me to admit anything I did not want to admit. Yes. I cut a deal with the United Nations and Project Utopia.

Yes, for immunity. Now then, what caused the fighting to break out in Kashmir on August 30th, 2006?

China was trying to force the hands of both Pakistan and India. The sovereign nations had no choice but to defend their interests.

So you went into the conflict hoping to avoid civilian casualties.

That is correct.

And did you succeed in your goals?

(sigh) Obviously not. I believe the casualty reports state that 516 civilians were killed before the situation was under control.

Why did those people die?

Because the Chinese were stupid enough to attack.

How many novas total showed up at the conflict, do you know?

Not really. I was a little busy trying to keep my head attached to my shoulders.

But you felt using novas in the conflict would save lives?

The fight would have been over very quickly if the Chinese and Indian forces hadn't called in other novas.

Do you know what the property damage alone was? It was in excess of three billion dollars.

That's a lot of money, I'm the first to admit that. But the situation would have been under control if no one else had deployed novas, and more to the point it would never have happened at all if China had continued to play by the rules.

What about the loss of life?

My answer is the same. Do you honestly believe I wanted to see people killed? I deliberately destroyed the wheels of vehicles and the treads of tanks. I never wanted to see anyone injured.

So who started the killings, not in the grand scale, but among the novas? Who started the killings?

.....

Shall I repeat the question?

No, I heard you. Mu Lung started the killings. He was aiming at me, and I managed to get out of the way.

Did he hit something else instead?

Yes. He hit a group of reporters and what I believe was a group of observers from the UN Peacekeeping Council.

What happened?

They died instantly. The quantum energies he generated turned them into ashes. I don't think they suffered.

And how did you react to what he did?

I tried to kill him. Those weren't soldiers or novas he killed, they were innocent bystanders. I was angry.

Did you succeed in killing Mu Lung?

No. His defenses were impervious to my assault. He shrugged off every attack I hit him with.

But Mu Lung is dead now, isn't he?

Yes.

When did he die?

He died when he was evading capture from Team Tomorrow Central. But I don't think they were responsible.

Why is that? Surely you don't feel he was more powerful than all of T2M combined....

No. I think he was a match for most of them, but he would have fallen to Pax, the same as the rest of us did.

What killed Mu Lung?

I think he killed himself.

Why would he commit suicide?

I don't think he did. I think he just couldn't control his quantum energies anymore.

You've made that claim several times, but there's no evidence to substantiate what you're claiming. Is it possible you're only saying that to ease the penalties against other novas who participated in the conflict?

No. I have no reason to. Each person in that fight was doing what he felt was best for their country or their bank account. They were patriots or mercenaries, not monsters. Besides, forensic evidence doesn't always work as well as an eyewitness.

And you actually saw Mu Lung's death? Is that what you're saying?

That is exactly what I am saying. I watched him die. He screamed when it happened. He was panicky and trying to get away from the area when it happened.

Despite the fact that you were trying to kill him earlier, by your own admission?

Yes. Since Team Tomorrow had shown up, most of us had put aside our differences to deal with them. I'd almost reached him when he... exploded. I've never seen anything that bright in my entire life. I'm pretty sure I never will again.

It says in your original deposition that Mu Lung "glowed very brightly, his entire body surrounded by energy. He was moving away from the ground and trying to break from the battle, but it happened too fast." Would you explain in detail exactly what happened?

He flew straight up, far faster than I've ever seen him move before. I knew something was wrong, and I went in pursuit. I wanted to see if I could help him.

The incident blinded you, didn't it?

Yes. But the doctors tell me they've seen evidence of ocular regeneration. It might take a few months, possibly a year, but I'll likely be able to see again.

What was the effect of the explosion on the area below?

The tanks and the military vehicles melted in an instant. The people operating them were vaporized. Tiger Five of the Indian forces and Fong of the Chinese were killed in the conflagration as well.

KARACHI HISTORY

Introduction

Karachi, Pakistan has become a city of industry. Modern production techniques and alternative power sources derived from nova biological processes have combined to create an industrial monolith. In the last decade, the country and most especially the city have turned to the manufacture of electronics and computer components. Almost as importantly, they have begun manufacturing new technologies.

But, although Karachi has become an economic powerhouse, it has not grown away from the political strife that has haunted the region's people for years. Politics, ethnic background and religion continue to breed violence in the area, despite the coming of the novas... or perhaps because of it. Political powermongers from three nations have taken to using novas as weapons in a campaign to destroy any competition. That seems to have changed since the last skirmish in Kashmir, but most expect to see more elites in action in the near future.

Important Data

Karachi is a very large city, and it continues to grow at a terrific pace. The city is one of the Middle East's major metropolitan areas, with high-tech industry on the rise and a major airport sporting some of the best security in the world.

Karachi has a desert climate, with average winter temperatures in the mid teens and average summer temperatures in the high 20s. Rainfall per year is roughly 20 centimeters, though that has changed in the last decade, increasing to almost 75 centimeters. The main cause of this change is a nova in the area, or at least that is the most common belief. No one has identified the nova responsible, but there is nothing else to explain the radical increase in humidity.

Karachi's population has grown from 5,483,000 to almost 12 million in the last decade, but little of the city has changed. The biggest growth spurts have been inland, away from the Arabian Sea and moving along the banks of the Indus River. Very careful planning and Utopian supervision have prevented radical increases in pollution, but the local police have reported an increase in crime despite the government's best efforts. Most of the crime is in the form of domestic disputes and conflicts between neighbors of differing religious affiliations.

The main industrial complex in Karachi is in the area closest to the Arabian Sea, as are the airport and the banking institutions. The area looks very different from the buildings in the surrounding neighborhoods, harboring the only high-rises within the original city. The new living complexes near the Indus River also sport several high-rises, but they are more aesthetically pleasing and designed to fit into the landscape. There are very few nightclubs or bars in the city; the predominantly Muslim population frowns on such things. There are, however, several "museums" dedicated to the novas and to the history of the city, which remain open late into the night and offer various sorts of refreshments. These locations offer alcoholic beverages, as well as Western-style hamburgers and pizza.

History

N-Day changed the city of Karachi for the better in the eyes of most. Within weeks of the initial shock, three people had come forth with ideas on how to make the city more successful. One of them was a nova named Zuhin Alhazred Mohammed, whose intelligence was altered by his eruption. Along with other radical thinkers, and with the blessings of those who heard his plans, Mohammed transformed Karachi. The laws in the land, while always strict, were altered and more carefully enforced. Religious persecution was made a crime, and while it has taken almost a decade, most now believe in leaving others to practice their own faiths or at least pretend to do so in public. Zuhin Alhazred Mohammed, often simply called "Zam" by his associates, increased the city's output of manufactured goods by almost 1000% in the first five years and carefully detailed plans for building new housing and for separating the industrial complex from the living quarters of the citizens. Crime was down, profit was up and the low cost of living and educational opportunities in the city made Karachi a magnet for the disenfranchised.

It should have been a perfect time, but problems remained. The most significant difficulty, the one that continues to this day to be a burden on the city and on all of Pakistan, is the trouble in Kashmir. Though each side refuses to take blame for the incidents, it's commonly believed that the Chinese were the first to make advances on Kashmir, seeking to claim the territory as their own. Intervention by Utopia stopped the skirmishes from go-

ing too far, but several novas were injured in the conflicts and the entire region was separated from all three of the countries involved in the fighting.

Political requests that the land be returned to the rightful owners proved useless, as no one could make a solid claim to the proper ownership of the land and even the people in the Kashmir region couldn't decide who they would rather be permanently affiliated with. The older divisions in the region remained unchanged, and the stalemate lasted for four years. Finally, China moved forward again, and the governments of India and Pakistan agreed to send in novas to prevent the Chinese from taking the area.

What had only been minor battles for the region in the past exploded into a full-scale war. China was prepared for the novas and released its own superhumans to do battle. In the process, thousands of civilians were injured or killed and billions of dollars in damage were inflicted on the land. Once again the battles ended in a stalemate, but the cost this time was astronomical.

Zuhin Alhazred Mohammed was blinded in the war but not ready to call the situation settled. Along with several other novas from around the world, he has dedicated a great deal of his time to restoring Kashmir's ecology. This has not stopped him from continuing to work toward a better economy in Karachi and Pakistan as a whole, but it has led to him being away from home a great

deal of the time. In the two years since the end of the conflict, Mohammed has contributed greatly to rebuilding the ecosystem of the Kashmir district. His success, however, has also lead to the same grumblings as before about who should have control of the area.

Almost despite itself, the city of Karachi is becoming a modern world power. Whether or not the people of the region can accept the changes remains to be seen. The new laws separating religious beliefs from the enforcement of the law have opened avenues that are only just beginning to be explored fully. Several companies have requested licenses for opening entertainment centers that would introduce alcohol and electronic entertainments to the area in ways never seen in the past. None have been turned down. The current rumors state that a Star Lord's franchise plans on opening in the city and that another company is seriously considering an amusement park.

Important Features

The new Karachi has a simple philosophy: Novas mean profit. Karachi is following the same principles that Japan and others have followed in the past, actively seeking novas to hire for research and study. Those with the mental capacity are hired to help design new technologies; those with the raw power are paid well to work as lab rats in experiments on just how they manipulate quantum fields.



The two most significant parts of the city for novas are the factory complex, with its numerous offices and manufacturing centers, and the rapidly growing "strip," where bars and entertainment centers are spreading quickly. The strip provides more forms of distraction than any other area of its sort in the Middle East, and it has only just begun to take shape. Muslim groups protest the growing entertainment zone, but so far all protests have been peaceful. A lot of people fear that will change.

The factory complex is primarily made up of just what the name implies, but a growing number of foreigners in the region feel safer staying within the area, and a number of new shops have begun cropping up to handle their needs. OpNet access in the area is greater than anywhere else in Karachi, and the shows often seen by the people there would have been cause for serious legal troubles only a few years ago. The city is changing very quickly, and while it has maintained its peace so far, it's doubtful that the peace will hold.

Luminaries

Zuhin "Zam" Alhazred Mohammed

Background: Zuhin Alhazred Mohammed was born in Karachi and sent off to school in England when he was in his teens. Though he was a good student, he was hardly the head of his class. He returned to his homeland only weeks before the *Galatea* exploded and began to change almost immediately after the explosion. The most obvious difference in Zam is that he is now completely hairless, but the truly radical alterations all took place in his intelligence and the strange powers that manifested within a week of N-Day.

Zam is not religious, which has factored into some of the suggestions he's made and was certainly a factor in the radical changes to Karachi's laws that he proposed and which were accepted. He is also no longer blind. Despite the horrific incident in Kashmir, he has made a full recovery. The largest change that has come about is in his philosophies. He no longer wishes to see Kashmir taken by anyone. Instead he prefers the idea of a sovereign Kashmiri nation, free of all external influences.

Description: Zam stands six and a half feet tall and unsettles most people who don't know him. Despite his completely hairless body and slightly bulging brow, he is actually considered a sex symbol by many women, a fact he seems to remain completely ignorant of. He is very muscular, but not to the point many novas reach. Though



it's barely noticeable at this point, both his skin and his eyes are beginning to take on a metallic sheen.

Others most often see him when he needs something. For the most part he tends to stand in the same spot for hours at a time, contemplating whatever problem strikes him at the time and calculating the best way to handle the matter. At the current time, he's working most diligently on ways to retard the growth of the M-R node, fearing that the continued expansion in its size could be the cause of several unpleasant incidents he's heard about and the death of Mu Lung as well. He has not shared this theory with anyone to date.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 2

Abilities: Academics 5, Arts 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 4, Computer 5, Drive 1, Engineering 5, Firearms 1, Interrogation 1, Intrusion 2, Linguistics 5 (Urdu, Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Spanish), Medicine 4, Meditation 4, Melee 3, Science 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Attunement 2, Backing 5, Cipher 2, Contacts 5, Influence 3

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 9, Taint 4 (Loss of Hair, Bulging Skull)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence ••• (Scientific Prodigy)

Quantum Powers: Flight •••, Force Field •••, Telekinesis •••

As I stated in the introduction to this book, I had not been to Japan since I was a child, when my family decided to move to the US. Returning was something of an eye-opening experience. Everything that had been true of Japan in the past — what I remembered from my early childhood and what my parents told me as I grew up in a foreign land — was different. The people in Japan have persevered against what seemed like impossible odds, recovered from a crushing economical deficit, and they've done so because they looked to the future. That very same future now seems ready to bring down everything the nation has struggled to rebuild.

The novas have been responsible, directly and indirectly both, for completely altering the nation of Japan. From the foundations of their religious beliefs to the stability of the nation's economy, everything seems to focus on the novas and their amazing abilities. But what sort of world is it where the actions of an select few can make so big a difference? I speak here as a sociologist, not as a nova. I am a nova, make no mistake. Many of you have seen me, and a few have even written me letters. But what I deal with now has far more to do with the course of a nation than my ability to fly.

When I arrived in Tokyo, I was prepared to simply visit the city, to examine all the places I had heard about growing up and, possibly, to see some of the relatives my parents often told me about.

I was not prepared to be treated as a god or to have a dozen offers from different sources that wanted to get to know or exploit me. In less than a week, I was approached by Nippontai and by several businesses that wanted to do research on my abilities or sought my endorsement of their products. Several representatives of the Kamisama Buddhist cult approached me as well, most

offering literature on the beliefs of their religion. A people who shouldn't have even known about my abilities treated me as a cultural icon. You see, I was travelling under an assumed name. Somebody somewhere must have let them know.

As you might imagine, I was a little taken aback by the sudden interest in me.

Most of you wouldn't recognize me on the street, which is one of the reasons I choose to wear a mask when I am doing my nova thing. I gave up in disgust and put on my mask only three days after arriving. Just because a few people had recognized me didn't mean I wanted everyone else to recognize me as well.

Have you ever seen Tokyo? Well, it's a place as full of contradictions as it is of people. Ancient religious shrines and beautiful parks are spread across an area where many of the buildings rise to well over 100 stories. Traffic that could drive the sanest person mad with rage coexists with a quietly repressed sense of expectation. Over 15 million people live in Tokyo, and most of them seem to be waiting for something to happen. Just what that something is, I can't say, but I too expect it to occur soon. There's a tension in the air that tells me a storm is coming, and when the storm hits, it will change everything again.

As soon as my mask was in place, I noticed the change in the people around me. I think I should point out here that surprising number of people wear masks in Tokyo these days. It's become the latest fashion statement in some of the subcultures, and I suspect the Kamisama Buddhist movement is directly responsible. I guess if you can't be an incarnate god, you can at least dress the part. This notion reminds me

From *The Rebuilding of a Nation* by Dr. Misaga "Firefly 27" Harihoto

of Elvis Presley's fame and how he must have felt the first time he saw the Flying Elvises — if he in fact ever did see them. But there's a difference between being the real thing and dressing the part. I saw no fewer than 30 people dressed in my outfit on the streets of Tokyo — a fact that has my lawyers foaming at their collective mouths because they haven't yet managed to get me a cut of the profits from the costume sales: My likeness is trademarked, as is the name Firefly 27. Still, there was no telling me from them. They all had normal amounts of body fat for a non-nova, and the ladies dressed in my costume had curves where I do not. I was no longer treated as a person, I was treated as something more than a person. Not everyone acted as if I was, in fact, a god, but a disturbing number of them did. I'm not a devoutly religious man. It was unsettling and a little heady.

Within hours, I was offered the presidential suite at several hotels, and I had to have my agent flown over to deal with the business offers.

I'm used to this to a certain extent. I am, after all, a nova and well known. But the nearly fanatical levels reached in Japan were scary.

All of this is still leading to the main focus of the book you hold in your hands: Novas have made radical changes in the way Japan and her citizens think. These changes are dangerous in their extremism, and the tensions they're causing are going to be a major problem in the future if they aren't rectified immediately. If some sort of accord isn't reached between the religious factions, the business factions and the political powers in Japan, I fear for the continued existence of the nation.



TOKYO HISTORY

Introduction

Nova fever is a common enough notion in this day and age. People who would otherwise never be noticed have gained instant celebrity. But in Japan, the concept has reached new heights. The novas are responsible for the economic recovery of Japan as a result of *Saisho*. That alone would have made them national heroes to many people, but the Kamisama Buddhist movement increased their instant popularity to unbelievable degrees. The religious fervor taken up by the youth of Japan has already caused a great deal of trouble, and it's only likely to get worse as time goes on. The Japanese government and the police are not happy with the followers of the newest and fastest-growing religion in Japan, but there is little they've been able to do about it so far.

The UN's technological proscriptions are a constant source of irritation to the manufacturers in Japan, and the export of such items by the Yakuza hasn't helped calm matters down in the least. But the worst trouble is the growing rift between the government's desires and the Kamisama Buddhists' plans for the future. A number of novas working for Nippontai and Utopia are also followers of this new religious movement, and the conflict of interest hasn't been ignored. Should the government actually decide to punish the followers of the new religion, they could well alienate the very people who could conceivably put a stop to the increasing influence of the Kamisama Buddhists. The only people they could hope to turn to in that case would be nova elites, and there are few in Japan that feel they could hire trustworthy operatives.

Important Data

Japan is made up of a collection of islands and is one of the economic centers of the world. The Japanese islands extend in an irregular crescent from Russia to the island of Taiwan. Japan proper consists of the large islands of Hokkaido, the northernmost; Honshu the largest island, called the mainland; Shikoku; and Kyushu, the southernmost. The combined area of these islands is about 362,598 square kilometers. The whole of Japan and its associated islands covers 377,389 square kilometers.

The land in Japan is very diverse, running from long plains of flatlands all the way to mountains and everything in between. The temperature ranges greatly from

place to place and runs between 5 and 16 degrees Celsius. There are heavy rains and storms for almost half of the year and seldom any fear of drought. Despite the numerous rivers in Japan, there are few which can be navigated by anything larger than a raft and none of which can accommodate a transport ship.

The changes that the coming of the novas has brought to Japanese religion are beginning to prove uncomfortable. Whereas novas are considered celebrities in most of the world, they are looked upon as near gods by a significant and rapidly growing portion of Japan's citizenry.

One of Japan's biggest problems in this era remains the same one the nation has suffered for centuries. The land is vastly overpopulated. Over 130 million people live on the islands of Japan, with over 75% of that population being maintained in the urban areas of Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya, Kobe and Kyoto. The population is 97% Japanese in makeup, with only 3% of the people living there being from other locations around the world.

The main resources of Japan are agricultural in nature. Japan actually manages to take care of over 70% of the food supplies needed for the population. But the main export of Japan remains technology. The Japanese are ahead of the game when it comes to the manufacture of new technologies and the export of cars and electronics.

History

The novas have had a profound impact on Japan and in particular on Tokyo. *Saisho*, "the New Beginning" plan of the Japanese government, enjoyed great success in bolstering Japan's economy. But there have been controversies. Several of the new technologies developed have been censured by the UN and Project Utopia, which has been a serious cause of stress between Japan and the world at large.

Not to be denied, the Yakuza started a new wave of exports in forbidden technologies. While these deliveries are illegal, there are plenty who believe the Japanese government is doing nothing to stop them and might even be aiding the Nakato in getting their hands on the technology in exchange for a share of the profits. While the business might seem small in comparison to the drug cartels, there is a very real danger in the

eyes of Project Utopia. Some of the proscribed technology is in the form of energy sources that could all too easily be converted into military capabilities. Just as importantly, many of the technologies involved deal with cybernetics. While the notion of replacement limbs is fully acceptable, the potential for using the same technology to hide weapons within a living body is too great. Terrorism could potentially run rampant if anyone could hide a bomb within their body with no real fear of discovery. There are rumors, and most seem inclined to believe the rumors are accurate, of at least three novas working for the Nakato and aiding in getting the proscribed technology to other places.

One of the most radical changes in Japan has been the creation of and the resulting explosive popularity of the Kamisama Buddhist faith, especially among young adults. Bodhisattva Masato, the founder of the religion, is treated like an incarnate god in many parts of the isles. There are rumors that Masato has developed a way to generate the M-R node in his followers. Most people scoff at the notion, but two of his nova followers claim Masato gave them their abilities. If there is any truth to their claims, Masato could be the most powerful nova on the planet and certainly the only one who might have the power to generate his own army of novas.

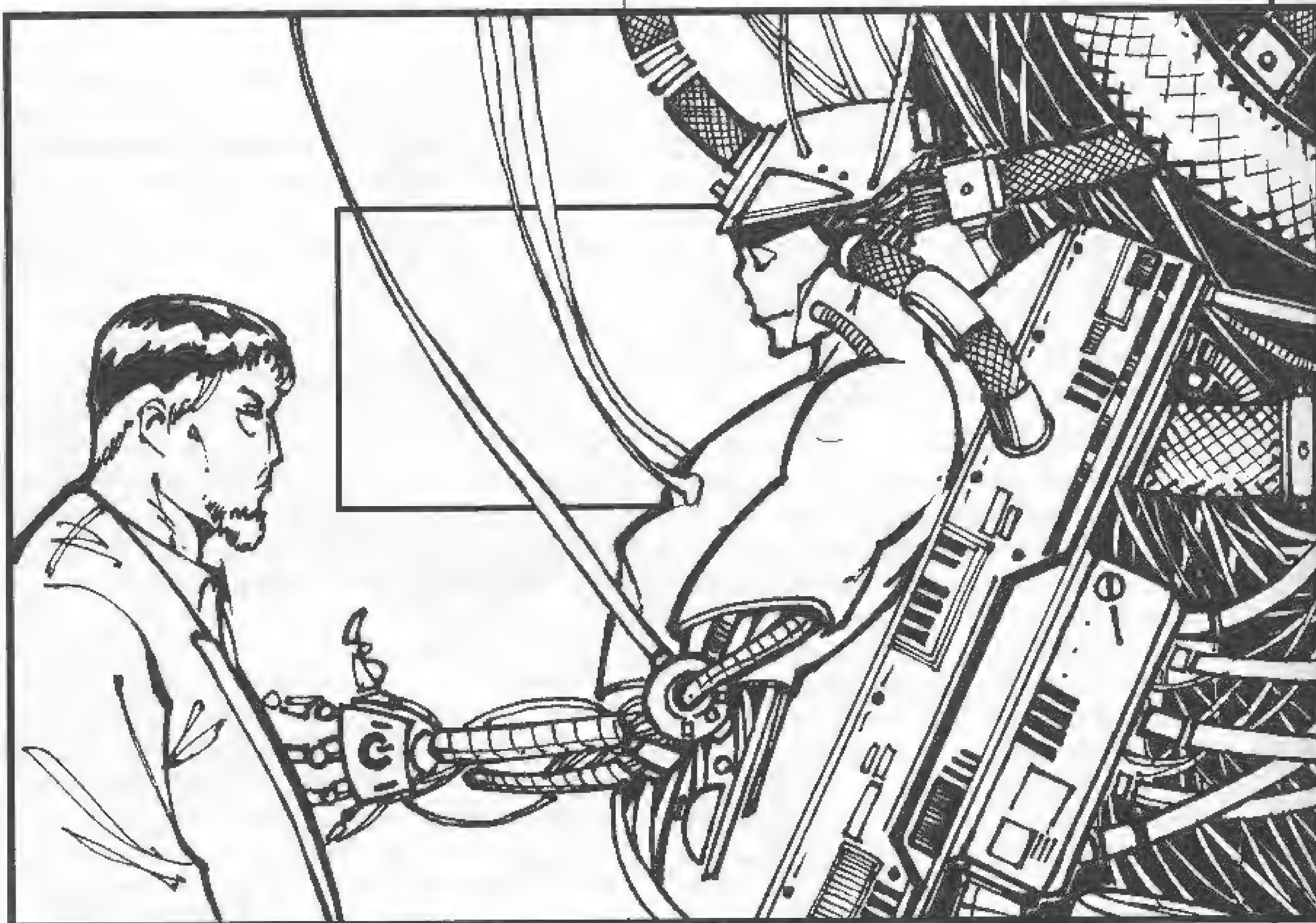
Japan's reputation for xenophobia is perhaps overstated from time to time, but the nation's displeasure with Project Utopia's Team Tomorrow is a reality. At the present time, a new gathering of novas is being worked on, one that would have the same free hand as T2M when

it comes to handling troubles. Though many people throughout the world find the creation of Japan's national nova team Nippontai a source of derision, it's hugely popular in Japan proper, and it's been extremely successful in its endeavors. One of the worst side effects of the team's presence, however, has been an increasing dislike of T2M and Project Utopia's goals. While nothing has truly come from this so far, many fear the creation of the Nippontai could well be the start of a break between Japan and the rest of the world.

Important Features

Hardware, software and everything in between are the main industries in Tokyo. The creation of new technologies is extremely important to Japan's economic growth and where a great deal of time and money are spent. Research and development have become ways of life for almost every legitimate business and a fair number of the shady ones as well.

One area where the Japanese are excelling these days is in the production of raw energy. With almost 200 power plants in the country, there was a time when the Japanese had to spend a great deal of money on the import of the necessary fuels to generate energy in their power plants and nuclear reactors. That time has passed. Thanks to the work of Bodhisattva Masato and a few others, Japanese corporations have developed radical new energy sources that replenish themselves. The exact nature of these sources remains a very carefully guarded secret. One of the more outlandish beliefs is that



the Japanese have cloned gigantic M-R nodes to pull in quantum energy and then use new quantum converters to change the raw power into electricity.

The center of Tokyo is dominated by the Imperial Palace and its surrounding grounds. Even today the Emperor of Japan lives here, but several additions have been made in the last decade, not the least of which is the New Edo Shrine, the main shrine for the Kamisama Buddhists, which is just outside the palace grounds proper. To the southwest of the palace, the *Kasumigaseki* district holds most of the important government buildings including the very public headquarters of Nippontai. Tours of the headquarters are given regularly. East of the Imperial Palace is the *Marunouchi* district, the leading business district, where most of the research and development laboratories are kept under extremely tight security. Still further to the east is the heart of the entertainment district, the *Nihonbashi-Ginza*, where the vast majority of shops and clubs are found. The newest Star Lord's is only weeks from completion and runs in direct competition with the NOVA club established several years ago. Off to the west of the central portion of the city is the *Yamanote* district, where the wealthiest families and the vast majority of foreign embassies are nestled in the verdant hills. Project Utopia has a small base of operations in the area, training new novas and dealing with the politics of keeping Japan a part of the rapidly changing world. To the northwest of the city proper is the area called *Shitamachi*, the "low city," where many of the universities and institutions of higher learning can be found. These places have become something of a hotbed of activity in the last few years as the growing Kamisama following draws more of the youth of Tokyo into a change from their earlier beliefs.

Luminaries

Takako Orinama

Background: Ms. Orinama tends to stay out of the limelight. She feels that's for the best, especially since the work she does is patently illegal. Orinama works for the Nakato, guarding most of their transports of sensitive materials... especially the sort of sensitive materials that other nations are glad to buy on the sly. She only gets involved in jobs as a result of nova interference or in rare cases when the ship she's on is out-classed by another craft with greater firepower. Should someone foolishly decide the time has come to break up the trading of proscribed technology, Orinama is there and ready for them.

Why does Ms. Orinama work for the Yakuza? Because that's what her family has done for generations.



Though only an active nova for the last two years, she's proven to be very effective in deterring would-be heroes. She is very popular with the Nakato and is being groomed for a place of high authority when she is older (her nova powers are useful enough that they are willing to make... allowances for her gender), a fact she doesn't quite comprehend as yet.

Description: Ms. Orinama is very attractive, though few people ever see her long enough to discover that fact. She wears a simple black leotard and a copy of the mask of whichever nova she's decided she likes that particular week. At the ripe old age of 17, she still hasn't made up her mind about which nova she will marry.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 1, Endurance 5, Etiquette 2, Firearms 4, Intrusion 3, Legerdemain 2, Martial Arts 3, Melee 3, Resistance 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Style 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Attunement 3, Backing 3, Cipher 2, Contacts 2, Dormancy 4, Mentor 4, Resources 2, Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 6, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity ••••• (Accuracy, Catfooted, Enhanced Movement, Fast Tasks, Flexibility), Mega-Wits ••••• (Enhanced Initiative, Multitasking, Quickness, Synergy)

Quantum Powers: Boost (Strength) •••••

"How To Survive LA" by Lorenzo King, *Anarchy Webzine*, Winter 2007

Welcome to the City of Angels; I hope you survive your stay. The first thing you've got to remember that there is no LA. The locals, you see, live in Burbank or Santa Monica or Westwood or Agora Hills or Saint Peter. If you don't have the proper zip code, you're less than nobody. Of course, with all the different time zones here, if you have a good zip code you'll likely never see any of the lesser inhabitants.

The first thing the enterprising troublemaker needs to know, of course, is to avoid the cops. I've heard some places in the US actually have decent cops. Well, you're not in Mayberry any more, kids, so don't mistake any of these officers for The Fireman. While there may be a few idealists on the force, you won't meet 'em; most people join the LALE to beat up fags, spics, niggers and, of course, poor people of any color. The scariest thing is that many of these cops aren't white either. Maybe I'm a bit too negative here, but I've never been rich or pale enough to see the good side of these dudes.

Subject: LA

To: Novalife Mailing List

From: Nyteshade

Date: Dec 14, 2007, 12:19 PM

This place has more of us than I've ever seen. Then again, it's also got more people than I've ever seen. It's freaking huge. It's looking more and more like the stories of instant fame and success are more vaporware. I've got an offer to be on a talk show, but I'm not real sure I want to go on after a segment about Siamese twins and the people who love them. However, it's pretty slash in lots of other ways. No one stares at anyone. I've seen folks wearing only roller skates, a cape, and latex body paint order coffee in a diner in Burbank, and no one batted an eye.

On the down side, you can kiss your car stereo goodbye. My car has been broken into twice and I've only been here a month. They're talking about making the car alarm the California state bird. The time zone thing takes some getting used to, but the traffic is great, so on the freeways you can get anywhere in 20 minutes. Here that means there's always someplace open. Dinner at 3 AM, movie rentals at 3 AM; I could really get to love this place.

The Valley metroplexes are the latest trend in LA living. Just think of it, a mall, office building, apartment complex and high-security parking lot all in one. Some of these places have even got their own amusement parks and private schools. The largest of these suckers holds over 5,000 happy citizens, and some of the wealthier ones have living levels that look like rows of small townhouses on narrow suburban streets.

Of course, the skies are video screens, and the plants are injected with preservatives to make them look alive, but hey, you can still live in your own little corporate paradise tucked well away from the real LA. Since the 'plexes are private property, no one but the servants, clerks and residents gets to even enter these buildings without permission. Everyone who lives or works there has an ID chip on a card or piece of jewelry.

If you have a mind to get into any illegal activity, give the 'plexes a miss. The additions to the Home Shield Law (the one which allows you to freely cap anyone entering your house without permission) allows the 'plexers to kill anyone unauthorized who enters the habitation levels. These folks have their own little world, they don't give a damn about the rest of this city as long as their shops and juice bars still have folks working in them. Even the LALE isn't welcome here, these places hire their own goons, overpaid thugs who make the officers of the LALE look like pretty laid-back dudes.

Mind you, the really rich wouldn't be caught dead in the 'plexes. They're still living up on their huge estates in the hills. Of course, this is earthquake country, and the hills are pretty unstable. Just last year, two of the local novas had to fly an entire mansion to safety before the mudslides carried it 200 meters straight down. The rich folks with a bit more sense live in Beverly Hills or in huge compounds way out east in the deep desert. In all these places, security is the name of the game.

Down in the main basin, life is still pretty much like those 1990s gangsta flicks made it out to be. East LA is poor, Watts sucks, and Compton sucks even worse. It's still the same old rat-trap houses on hot, bright, hopeless streets lined with palm trees. This whole new millennium thing has done precious little for this side of town. The smog is almost gone, but the local chemical plants make up the difference, and work is still no easier to find.

The latest refugees and *vatos locos* from the death squads and border wars down in South America are as well armed as you'd expect. Some of the tougher ones are used to fighting back against the military and the cops. Maybe they'll cap a few and make life better for everyone, instead of simply shooting their neighbors like many of the G's down here like to do. Then, of course, you've got the real bushwhackers in Griffith Park. The old hunt-n-gather lifestyle has a lot to recommend it when compared to the local alternatives. Besides, I've heard mule deer stew ain't too bad if you can snag some dried chipotle peppers.

Hollywood is still Hollywood. Before I start, I hope to hell you aren't one of those farmers who thinks that movies are still made in Hollywood or that the high-fashion set ever walk around here. Can those thoughts. This is the number-one residence zone for immigrants who don't have other communities, movie wannabes who can't afford the redeye to Mumbai, slackers, hustlers and queerfolk who don't have enough money or the right hair to live in West Hollywood. Hollywood Boulevard itself houses more cheesy souvenir shops and cheap porno joints than anywhere else on the face of the Earth. It's also the single best spot to people-watch in the entire city.



During the day, you've got Japanese, German and Ethiopian tourists in hordes, along with a goodly number of non-LA US tourists. When evening comes, most of the tourists vanish with the sunlight and you have all the con artists, hookers and similar night people out looking for customers. Generally, enough locals show up to keep everyone happy. Later on, it's mostly drug dealers and the rough trade. This is a good time to look for novas, too. I guess some of those elites get hard hanging out next to John Wayne's star. Past midnight, that's all gone, and you're left with homeless people and the street-cleaning trucks chasing them out by hosing down the sidewalks.

Speaking of Hollywood, if any of you want to make it big in pictures, go home now. You'll end up hustling, doing porn or "starring" in a Camparelli-Zukhov snuff film. If you simply can't get over the idea of your name in lights, get yourself a ticket to Bombay.

"Novawood USA," Jennifer Castanaveras, *Entertainment Bytes*, May 19, 2007

If you're a nova or simply into novas, LA is where it's all happening. Ever since Spielberg released *Nova* eight years ago, they've been flocking here, along with all the usual groupies, fans and wannabes. Think about it for a minute. You can lift a truck with one hand and fly as fast as a commercial jet, but what's all that compared to seeing your face in theaters, on TV or on OpNet? Everyone wants their 15 minutes, and the novas are no exception.

I've also been seeing bunches of non-industry novas in town. Having a nova SO seems to be The Thing ever since the head of Arista Music got a nova BF. If you want to see novas, get yourself down to LA and hang out on Melrose for a while. Be quick, though; in a year or so they'll likely be as out as Senegalese food.

LOS ANGELES HISTORY

Los Angeles, USA

Important Data

Population: 19,865,000

Black 8%, Asian 15%, Caucasian 36%, Hispanic 41%

Official Language: English

Most common languages: Spanish, English, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian and Portuguese

Major Religions: Christian (primarily Roman Catholic, and various Protestant sects), plus many splinter sects and numerous new religions

History

In 1999, on the eve of the millennium, violent crime continued to increase in the Los Angeles area. In response to this threat, the mayor unified the sheriff's department and the police under a single authority. The result was the Los Angeles Law Enforcement Bureau. The LALE is in charge of all law enforcement in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. While the various regional police departments were abolished, strong regional divisions remain. LALE officers patrol wealthy regions like Beverly Hills, Westwood and sections of Orange County much more thoroughly than the slums of Compton and Watts or the barrios of East LA.

While beat cops still walk the more prosperous sections of the city, LALE's heavily armored jet-black sedans patrol the more dangerous regions. Police officers needing to visit the worst parts of the city typically do so in their new, heavily armed, rapid response helicopters. These vehicles are actually surplus US Army attack helicopters. While the LALE does manage to maintain order through most of the city and helps control violence in the poorest regions, it is widely regarded as the most corrupt and violent police department in the United States. LALE's recruiting slogan: "Join LA's Largest Gang" is often all too accurate, and many of the officers are little more than racist thugs who harass, injure and sometimes kill the city's poorest and most disenfranchised residents.

The most important change in LA occurred in 2003, when the city's ever-increasing population and

worsening traffic problems prompted Mayor Daniel Montoya to institute a radical traffic-control measure. When stacked freeways and public transport failed to significantly alleviate traffic congestion, dividing the city into 12 time zones was the only alternative. This system is unique in the world, and oddly enough, it seems to be working.

The city has been divided up into twelve sectors, or zones. Each zone has different legally mandated work times. The work hours in each zone are one hour off from each other. While the Glendale/Burbank Zone maintains the traditional 9-5 work hours, other zones vary from the 6 AM-2 PM hours of East LA to the 6 PM-2 AM shift in Compton/Watts. This system has resulted in the peak traffic of the previous morning and evening rush hours being spread out over half the day.

Of course, anyone looking at one of the zone maps can easily see that while the system works, the zones were not assigned by chance. The wealthy areas start work in the late morning and early afternoon, the middle-class regions start work in the traditional 8 AM to 10 AM range, and the poorest regions start work at dawn or in the late evening. More than ever before, income and race have divided LA's population. The poor of Compton are just waking up when the middle-class residents of Orange County are getting off work.

Important Features

In spite of its problems, LA is the largest — and one of the busiest — cities in the US. The zones have truly made LA into a city that never sleeps, and given the popularity of cocaine and spike, this statement can sometimes be taken quite literally. From parties by wealthy celebrities to gang wars with automatic weapons, from movie premieres and avant-garde gallery openings to unrivaled police brutality and unremitting poverty, anything found anywhere else in the world can also be found here. If rumor is to be believed, Russian roulette parlors and illegal labs performing human genetic engineering can be patronized by those with the desire and the money.

Although the wealthier areas are strictly patrolled, much of LA can be profoundly dangerous. Murder is mostly limited to freeway shootings, drug-related gang violence and accidental victims of drive-

by shootings. However, burglary, car break-ins and carjackings are more common than anywhere else in the United States. Over 10% of the population has a gun in their home or car, often in both.

In spite of its many troubles and substantial competition from Mumbai, for citizens of the US, LA still means Hollywood. More music, movies, videos and — especially — pornography are produced here than anywhere else in North or South America. Everyone from ultrapowerful novas to hopeful farm girls harbors dreams of stardom. Every year thousands flock to LA, following their dreams. Very few succeed, but the dream lives on.

For novas at least, LA offers more options for fame and glamour than simple stardom. Some novas have gone for the dubious fame of the talk-show circuit, prostituting themselves on N!, OpNet and other media; others use their connections, combined with flashy displays of their powers, to earn themselves places on the club and party scene. With over 40 novas now living in Tinseltown, LA has also become a mecca for baselines interested in these powerful beings. Nova-groupies are the latest in the long line of culture-junkies who have descended upon LA. One company now offers sightseeing tours that drive by the houses of some of the more well-known novas, who typically invest in large yards and private security to deter some of their more devoted “fans.”

Most recently, nova-worship in LA has spawned two nova-cults. The Divisians worship the radical nova Divis Mal. Ever since he issued the Null Manifesto in 2005, tens of thousands of baselines have looked to him either as a savior or a devil. The headquarters of the Divisians is just off of Hollywood Boulevard, in a somewhat rundown and disreputable part of Hollywood. So far the group is small and has attracted a few hundred lower-middle class fanatics seeking meaning in their empty lives, but it is growing rapidly. The cult’s leaders hope Divis Mal himself will visit them personally later this year.

The Sodality of the New Era believes that novas have been given divine gifts to help save humanity from a coming apocalypse. Its members seek to educate novas in the correct way to battle this unknown evil. SNE members also wish to live near powerful novas, so that they and their families will be protected during the coming disasters. While the nova Sop “Shatter” Choi seems to have been taken in by the SNE’s preaching and supports their cause, most other novas regard the SNE as annoying and intrusive cultists. A few novas have even filed restraining orders against SNE members. Stories abound that the SNE have been making plans to kidnap a few recalcitrant novas and attempt to reeducate them, but such rumors have thus far proved unfounded. Anyway, the scoffers say, how the hell could the SNE bring down a nova?



Other nova activities in LA are less odd, but equally disturbing. While the LALE maintains a strict, but unofficial, no-nova policy, numerous private security forces are eager to hire anyone powerful and dangerous. Some of these security forces are as heavily armed as the police and are quite happy to use lethal force to defend their ultra-wealthy clients. Having a uniformed nova patrolling your neighborhood is both an important status symbol and a definite comfort, especially since property crime in LA transcends boundaries of zone and zip code.

While LALE officers resent the "rentacops," they rarely object to these forces' treatment of offenders. "Killed while escaping" is a common result when dealing with felons. Between the Home Shield Law, which has been used to support the use of lethal traps and automated defenses, and nova security officers, crime directed against the wealthier inhabitants of Los Angeles can be an exceedingly dangerous endeavor.

Recent rumors speak of multigang alliances occurring in Compton, Watts and East LA. In response to rampant violence and the police's mixture of apathy and brutality, several multigeneration gangs like White Fence have attempted to combine radical politics, social protest and occasional armed resistance. Due to persistent rumors that the similar, but non-violent, effort during the 1960s fell apart after several murders committed by police-paid killers, current gang leaders are heavily armed and ready for trouble. A number of recent refugees from Central American death squads and South American dictatorships have moved into the neighborhoods of South Central and East LA; these individuals are well schooled in the art of armed resistance and are aiding these local resistance efforts.

Random violence has decreased in these neighborhoods, but organized vigilante violence against criminals has increased. Violent incidents against the few police foolish enough to enter these neighborhoods have also skyrocketed. Allegedly the radical nova Margolis Gutierrez is involved with this effort, and some claim that she is the leader of this alliance. Other nova involvement is unknown, but rumors of aid by militant Mexican novas run rampant. Regardless, the police chief and a number of wealthy citizen's groups have become concerned that this alliance, now known only as Mi Casa or MC, may spread beyond the poorest regions of the city.

Luminaries

Margolis Gutierrez

Background: Born in the barrios of LA, raised on radical literature written by the likes of Malcolm X and Che Guevara, Margolis became an outspoken feminist and activist. From an early age, she has con-

stantly sought to make life better in her 'hood, which has earned her many enemies within and outside her community. Margolis erupted in 2005, as she was being brutally gang-raped by young *machos* intolerant of her free-spoken ways; the would-be rapists ended up in the hospital or the ground. Within a year she had drawn the attention of many people in East LA and was widely regarded as a hero.

On several occasions she has stopped incidents of police brutality, which has earned her further fame and the ire of the law. Fortunately, she had enough witnesses that the police were reprimanded, and she was set free. These actions have placed her near the top of the LALE's enemies' list. Unfortunately for them, they can do little to her at this time.

Recently, several of the gangs in Compton and Watts have made efforts to unify and organize. Another as yet unknown nova is responsible for this effort, but Margolis saw a valuable opportunity; accordingly, she has used her vast intelligence and her massive charisma to aid this cause. Today, she is helping to forge an increasing number of ties between the newer Central and South American immigrant community in Watts and the established older Hispanic community in East LA. Her current plans are unknown, but she has occasionally talked of formally seceding from the rest of the city and forming a separate government.



Description: Margolis is an attractive, 25-year-old Hispanic woman with short dark hair and an intense stare. She dresses stylishly when making a public appearance; while she is hardly a fan of vapid cor-

porate consumerism, she knows the power of image to sway the masses.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Command 3, Drive 2, Endurance 5, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2 (Spanish, Portuguese, English), Martial Arts 3, Might 2, Resistance 4, Stealth 1, Streetwise 4, Style 2, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Attunement 2, Contacts 3, Influence 3, Resources 2

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 8, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Catfooted), Mega-Stamina • (Resiliency, Durability), Mega-Perception • (Ultrapерipheral Vision), Mega-Intelligence • (Tactical Prodigy), Mega-Wits • (Synergy), Mega-Charisma • (Natural Agitator)

Quantum Powers: Luck • • •

"Electric" William Greene

Background: William Greene is 26 years old. In 2004, he was a promising cadet in the LALE. During his first month of duty, he was cornered in a blind alley by a mugger he was pursuing. The mugger shot William in the leg, but William erupted, incinerating the mugger in a blast of electricity. William entered Utopia's LA Rashoud facility, and the LALE pressured him to resign. This was fine with him: After several weeks of Utopia-sponsored training, William promptly walked out on his benefactors and opened Greene Security, a private security agency which has rapidly become one of LA's most prominent firms. In time, William recruited another nova ("Invincible" Adam Ikonn) and over 100 well-trained baselines.

In addition to having the power of two novas on call constantly, Greene Security has stockpiled a wide variety of advanced, experimental and borderline-illegal technologies. Most of William's operatives are armed with flechette pistols and wear special body armor tailored to look like ordinary business suits. In part, Greene's agency is so popular because of the appeal inherent in being protected by novas. William uses this popularity and the money it generates to continue to fund his agency and his gargantuan coke habit (it takes a *lot* of coke to cut through his nova metabolism), not necessarily in that order.

Description: William is a handsome, muscular young African-American man who habitually wears police-style sunglasses and a Buendia-tailored eufiber suit. All of his powers involve producing and manipulating large amounts of electricity. When Greene uses his powers, he is covered in a crackling



electrical aura, and he is even capable of flying though electrical repulsion.

While typically cheerful and friendly to both clients and co-workers, William has a deep hatred for gangbangers, anarchists and anyone else who would upset the social order. Greene Security policy frowns on open murder (it's bad for PR), but muggers and thieves captured by his organization are often threatened and soundly beaten before they are turned over to the police. Even peaceful protesters who block traffic in front of his client's buildings have had fire hoses and tear gas used on them.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2, Command 3, Drive 3, Endurance 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Martial Arts 3, Might 2, Pilot 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Followers 5, Eufiber 3, Influence 3, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 6, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Accuracy), Mega-Stamina • (Hardbody)

Quantum Powers: Flight • •, Force Field • • • (Wall Extra), Immolate • • •, Quantum Blast • • • (Electricity), Quantum Conversion • • (Electricity)

Welcome to A-A, the slickest town of the Naught Decade. You've seen the pics, you've seen the vids, but you have to visit it to truly understand. When people talk about it all being enclosed, most of you probably expect it to be like a giant apartment building or one of those creepy suburban metroplexes springing up in LA. Think again; this place is open, airy and honestly breathtaking. There are interior balconies 20 stories up and the ceilings in most of the public areas are generally more than 6 meters high. Any of you who remember those old mags from the 1960s that talked about the world of tomorrow, should know that it's finally arrived. Where else can you travel an entire city from top to bottom and end to end by elevator? The apartments range from modest but extremely well built to palatial suites the size of many large houses. The most impressive dwellings even have interior atriums with gardens, fountains and similar flash. Think Roman villas and you're not too far off.

Unfortunately, all this world of tomorrow stuff leaves a lot to be desired in terms of good old-fashioned retro privacy — at least in the humble opinion of a Yank infidel. To maintain safety and order, cameras monitor all public places, and the Addis Guard — A-A's specially trained SWAT unit — is constantly ready to respond to any emergency. Unlike the dear old US, it doesn't look like anyone is using the cameras to catch dirt on folks. The laws governing such things are surprisingly good. However, any problems are dealt with remarkably fast. I lived in A-A for six months and the only serious crime I saw was one late-night mugging. Before I could call for help, the Guard showed up, tasered the crook to the ground, and helped the old guy being mugged to a nearby clinic. Security even shows up on the rare occasions when the locals, drunk

on success and banana wine, throw down in a refreshing barroom brawl or two. It's nice not to have to worry about trouble, but if you're used to urban life in the US, A-A can feel a bit too... starched.

Most A-Aers are shiny happy citizens, and those that aren't cause a whole lot less trouble; not because they've suddenly developed a social conscience when they moved here, but because they know darn well that they'll be caught and punished. It's hard to describe, but that dynamic can feel pretty odd at times. Still, pretty much no one objects, since it's actually safe to walk the streets of A-A after dark. Coming here from New York or LA can lead to serious culture shock.

Then there's all the behind-the-scenes stuff. Anti-littering laws and some cute, experimental little fireplug-shaped cleaning robots take care of most of the clutter, but maintaining the spotless appearance this city is famed for takes a whole lot of hard work. Of course, the robots can't do everything, and so you see a fair number of native Ethiopians riding sweeping machines and even pushing brooms. I mean, hey, they're fairly paid and live in the arcology, but the sight of Africans pushing brooms and wearing uniforms with nametags lets you know that... well, under the Pax Utopia, everyone's equal and some are more equal, to coin a threadbare phrase. There are no slums, the maintenance crews make sure that the whole place is kept in good condition, but the rich are still rich, and the poor.... You can still see the poor kids standing outside of the glitzy electronics

The New Unofficial Travel Guide by Denice Vance

shops on the mall-levels, looking at toys, games and computers that they'll likely never own.

For all that, A-A is still a wonderful place to visit, and a reasonable place to live. The rich, the famous and the M-R mavens from all over Europe, Africa and the Middle East flock here to socialize, sample the culture and make deals. Celebrity- and nova-watching are popular pastimes even for the locals. A-A also offers plenty of old-school baseline cashola, if you're careful and lucky. Utopia's making major deals here, big important deals which rumors claim will change the face of Africa. To further add to the fun, the Utopia S&T labs here are turning out fantastic new advances every month.

Other than on history vids, almost no one talks about the old city. Nearly a million locals still live in the northern section of the city. The region around St. George's Church and the old university are now a historic market district where locals sell a wide variety of good to tourists and arcology residents seeking some local color. The numerous restaurants and taverns offer

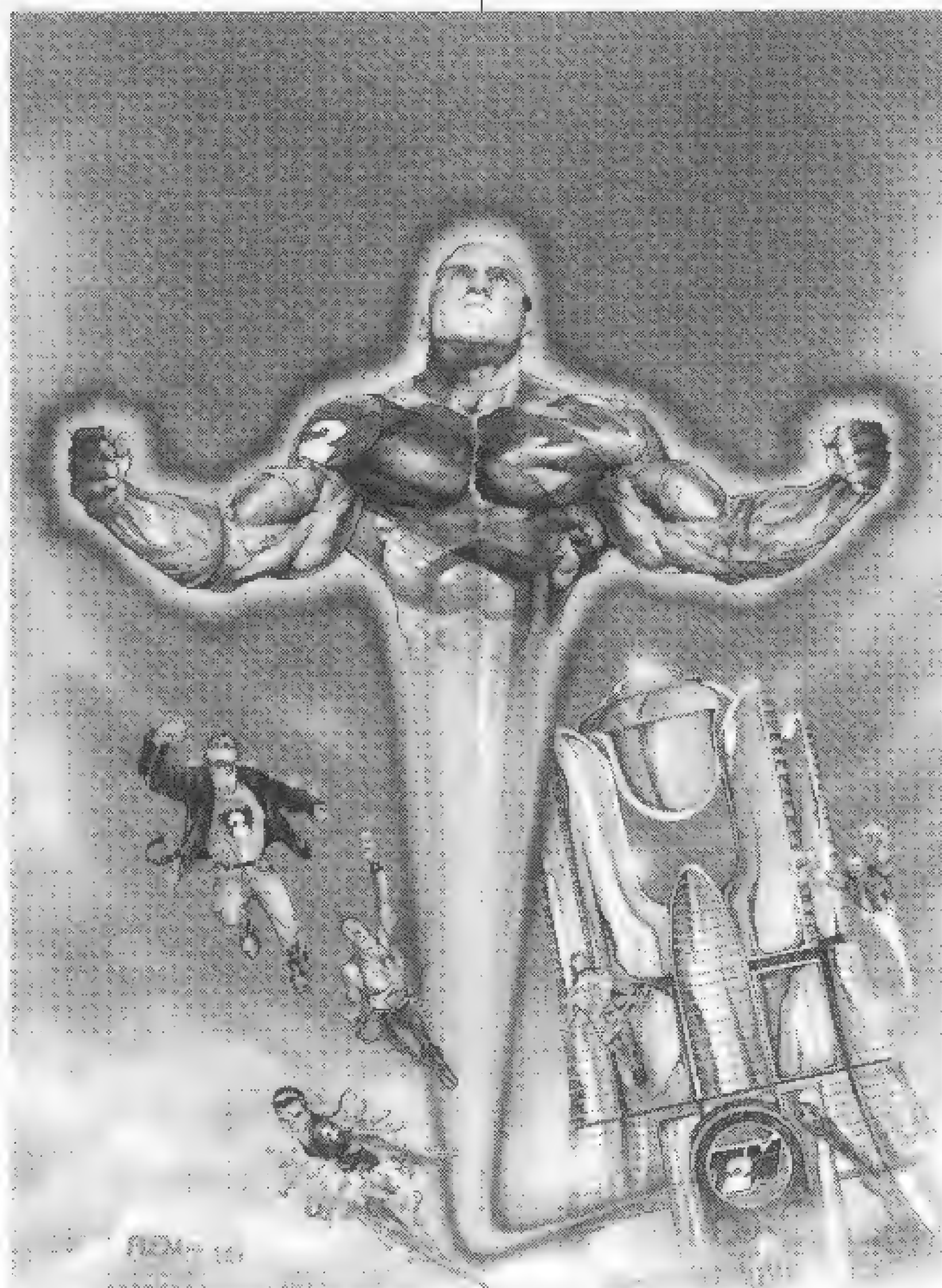
excellent local food and drink, and the shops have — so far — avoided falling into the trap of selling only cheap tourist gewgaws.

To the east, the narrow streets of the Addis Ketema district house much of the local population. The Merkato d'Indigino is a market district used mostly by the locals and the more knowledgeable arcology residents. The

vast majority of the old city is under 10 stories tall, and most of it is under five stories. With eucalyptus trees planted along the narrow winding streets it looks much like Athens or Rome.

When I visited Addis a decade ago, it was nightmarish. The old city looked much the same, but dust was

everywhere and on the outskirts were vast squatter shanties. It was run-down, arid and depressing. Now, the old town no longer has the wretched Third World look, and every resident has clean water, electricity and adequate food. I do wonder a bit about what the locals think of the arcology. It's brought immense prosperity, but its proposed expansion will soon devour even more of their city.



ADDIS ABABA HISTORY

History

This is truly the city that Team Tomorrow built. For most of the last half of the 20th century, Ethiopia was synonymous with starvation and want. In the early 1980s massive numbers of refugees poured out of Ethiopia in the wake of incessant civil wars. More continued to leave as these wars destroyed most of the arable land in the north of the country. Prior to these wars, Ethiopia was most notable for being the only major African nation which had remained independent of the European colonial regimes of 19th and early 20th centuries. The proud legacy of leaders like Haile Selassie inspired several of the more powerful novas working with Project Utopia to rebuild this city and the nation around it.

In 2003, when most people were first becoming aware of the true potential of the novas, Project Utopia work began on Project Abyssinia. The goal of this project was to return the vast, bleak desert of Ethiopia's central highlands to its original lush and pristine state. Combining the vast powers of more than 100 novas with Project Utopia's latest biotechnology, the project was completed in 2006. Today, this region is verdant grasslands, with an abundance of plant and animal life in numerous wildlife refugees, as well as large amounts of exceedingly fertile farmland. The famines of Ethiopia are a thing of the past. Instead, Ethiopia has become the breadbasket of Africa.

In 2004, in gratitude for Project Utopia's aid, the Ethiopian government gave Utopia a large area of land on the southern edge of the capital city of Addis Ababa. Here, Team Tomorrow built its African/ Middle Eastern headquarters, and Project Utopia located a large section of its research and technical facilities. Today, in addition to being the headquarters of the combined Central branch of T2M, Addis Ababa is truly an international city that has become one of the centers of early 21st-century life.

Finished in fewer than two years, the new sector of Addis Ababa is also the world's first true arcology. Complete with indoor gardens, spacious corridors and fabulous exterior views, Addis Arcology is a completely enclosed and climate-controlled city. It stands 30 stories high and covers

more than 12 square kilometers. Made largely of white ferroconcrete and blue-tinted plexiglass, Addis Arcology is not only one of the wonders of the world, it is also one of the fastest-growing and most prosperous regions on Earth. Nearly a million people have moved here in the last three years, and more are coming every day. In addition to already being a focus for new scientific and technological discoveries, the arcology is rapidly becoming an important center for culture, finance and entertainment. The arcology complex was created to house 2,500,000 people. Today it is now only 85% full, so housing is easily available and relatively inexpensive. This situation is unlikely to change in the near future, since the arcology was designed to be fully expandable. Additional construction could allow it to hold over six million residents.

Important Features

The arcology itself rises like a strange sparkling gemstone above the low, winding streets of old Addis Ababa. It's one of the wonders of the modern world, with 30 levels, extensive indoor parks and gardens. The arcology also has hundreds of elevators capable of moving both vertically and horizontally. Locally known as the *Trans*, these conveyances speedily move the population where they need to go. The arcology adjoins the airport, so many visitors never actually see any of the old city except through the arcology's enormous tinted windows.

As one of the local headquarters for T2M, almost a dozen novas reside here at least part-time. Two of them, Spinner and It, work as local security, troubleshooters and special-projects liaisons. A network of cameras and alarms throughout the arcology alert emergency services to any possible problem, ranging from fires to burglary to assault. While the large staff of emergency personnel takes care of the vast majority of problems, the novas deal with serious emergencies and sometimes respond to more mundane disturbances. In addition to easing the workload of the emergency workers, having novas occasionally show up to stop a mugging or a brawl has proven to be an exceedingly powerful deterrent to crime and violence.

Even though these novas show up quite rarely, the popular perception is that if you get too far out of line, a glowing, bulletproof nova will show up and drag you off to justice. A-A's novas, in conjunction with the Addis Guard, are passionately devoted to making this city the best place to live on Earth. So far, there have been no complaints of excess force by any of these novas. However, both It and Spinner regularly show off their powers when arresting offenders, sometimes to terrifying effect.

To further reduce problems for the many millions of people all crowded together in this densely packed but still luxurious city, the government maintains a strict policy of weapons control. Except for military and law-enforcement personnel, no one in

Addis Arcology can own or carry firearms. Pepper spray, tasers and similar nonlethal weapons are all still legal, but most people don't bother to carry them since the arcology is an extremely safe place to live.

While the city is peaceful and safe, it is far from dull. In addition to being a burgeoning cultural center, it has become the focal point of the new African revival. Novas, Project Utopia executives, African political leaders and hopeful African revolutionaries all congregate here to help work out their plans for the future of this increasingly prosperous continent. Recently there have been rumors that some of the more ambitious revolutionaries in Angola, Zaire and Egypt have been converging on the city in attempts to recruit novas.



Addis Ababa is also an excellent destination for novas who are seeking employment or who wish to make contact with highly placed novas or Project Utopia leaders. The African/ Middle Eastern chapter of T2M is the fastest growing of any of the regional branches. Project Utopia is determined to bring peace, prosperity and advanced technology to the entire African continent. Addis Ababa is a city on the move, and many people here are looking for new novas to help them move it in the correct direction.

Luminaries

It

Background: Outside of T2M itself, It is the most important Utopian nova in Addis Ababa. No one knows Its original race or gender, and the name came about as a joke while completing forms which asked for the sex of the respondent. It simply drew another box labeled "It". While there are numerous rumors about Its origin, It isn't talking.



About the only things anyone is certain about is that It was first seen in 2004, and It's originally from someplace in Africa. It is passionately devoted to the good of the common people and most especially to protecting the citizens of Addis Ababa against criminals, rogue novas and anyone or anything else which might threaten their safety and security. While It has never killed anyone, most people expect that this will change in time. It becomes very upset when innocents are harmed and has been known to dangle muggers off of high balconies while lecturing them about proper respect for the elderly. It recruited the Addis Guard while the arcology was being constructed and spends its working shifts patrolling the arcology for trouble.

Description: It appears to be a smooth, streamlined, genderless humanoid made of living metal. It is a bit over two meters tall, heavily muscled and exceedingly beautiful, but more like a living statue than a human being. It is nearly invulnerable to harm and has heightened Physical Attributes, but few other abilities, except for a truly commanding presence.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Appearance 4, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Command 4, Endurance 5, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 4, Might 2, Resistance 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Backing 4, Contacts 2, Influence 3, Resources 3

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 6, Taint 5 (smooth, sexless, metal skin)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength •• (Crush), Mega-Dexterity • (Rapid Strike), Mega-Stamina •• (Adaptability, Hardbody), Mega-Perception • (Electromagnetic Vision), Mega-Appearance • (Awe-Inspiring)

Quantum Powers: Armor ••• (Superheavy)

Anarchy Webzine, **Lorenzo King, Spring 2008**

If you're visiting from the West you're likely staying in some fancy hotel with OpNet access and all the standard luxuries of such places. Outside your door you'll run into illiterate, homeless beggars, people suffering from diseases long extinct in the West and human-powered vehicles.

These people seem like they are making a good effort to get things together, but they don't much like outside help, and you likely won't know how to help them anyway. The best thing you can do is to avoid becoming part of the problem. Unfortunately, that can be somewhat tough while you're here. The local government is your typical Third World snake-pit. Since the riots in the 1990s, things have been a little better. Today, there's a bit more opportunity for the little people, but *only* for those little people with enough money for bribes and good enough prospects for business loans.

Stay on the good side of the government while you're here. They mostly leave First Worlders alone, but they always have their hand out. You can buy yourself no end of minor trouble if you don't pay adequate bribes to the correct people. They also don't take any too kindly to dissidents here, so don't come here with any wide-eyed ideals about helping rebels. They know how to stay out of Indonesian jails, and you don't.

The city itself is one of the most bizarre places you've ever seen. You can buy almost anything here. Bootlegged software, music and vids are on sale in every market, and there are many varieties of new Japanese tech for sale if you know the right people. Most of the city consists of low buildings made of wood. In the poorest parts this heads into leaning shacks of corrugated tin. However, the new office districts look like downtown Tokyo or LA, with shiny skyscrapers and fancy cars.

Jakarta can be a pretty deceptive place. The people are friendly, polite and seem reasonably happy. I guess fresh fruit and a tropical climate help make up for not owning a pair of shoes. However, if they are pushed, things can get savagely ugly incredibly fast. Back in the 1960s several hundred thousand people were killed in a week. The riots of the late '90s were bad, but nothing like the '60s. The people here can be pushed pretty far, but if a serious enough government scandal comes to light, or if conditions get too bad, the knives come out and blood runs in the streets. Since it's mostly the blood of non-Indonesians, it's best to get out quickly if things look like they are starting to get tense.

JAKARTA HISTORY

History

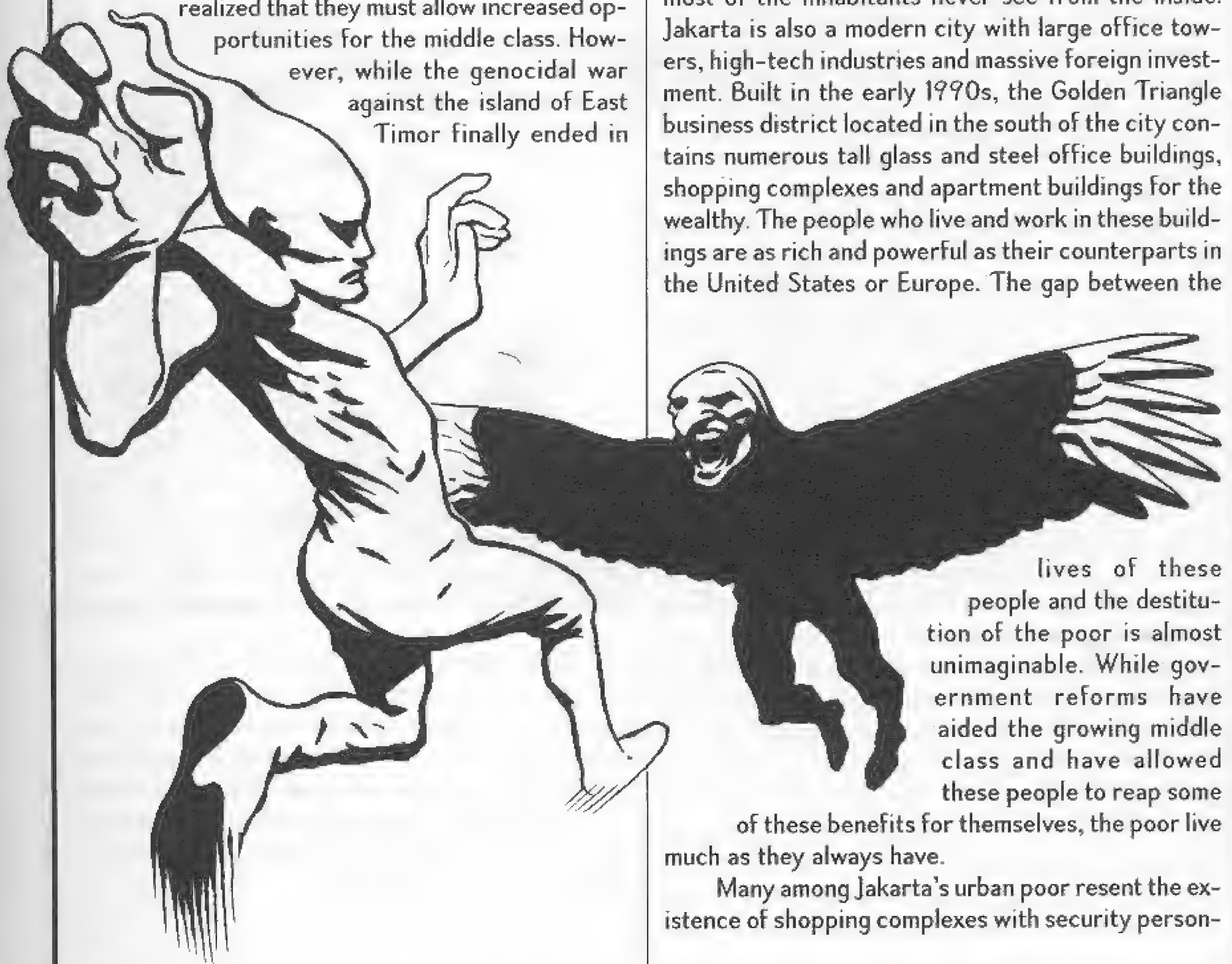
While many parts of the Third World have been transformed by Utopia, other regions are very much business as usual. Indonesia is the world's fifth largest nation and one of the most densely populated. The vast majority of its more than 200 million inhabitants live in squalid poverty. Some of the new crops developed by Utopia have helped alleviate the dangers of starvation, and the reduced pollution has increased the quality of life for everyone on the archipelago, but life has changed little for most inhabitants.

The economic collapse and near-revolution of the late 1990s brought economic reform to Indonesia. The ultra-wealthy who control the government realized that they must allow increased opportunities for the middle class. However, while the genocidal war against the island of East Timor finally ended in

2002, and political changes have allowed increased home rule for many islands, Indonesia is still an extremely poor, densely populated Third World nation where the vast majority of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture.

It is also a nation with a massively corrupt government which will do almost anything to bring more money into the state's coffers. While life in Jakarta is somewhat better than it was in the 1990s, it is still far from good for 90% of the city's inhabitants. Like the rest of Indonesia, most of the inhabitants are poor and make their living working in tiny shops, toiling in draconian, foreign-owned factories or picking the pockets of wealthy tourists.

However, there is another side to this city, which most of the inhabitants never see from the inside. Jakarta is also a modern city with large office towers, high-tech industries and massive foreign investment. Built in the early 1990s, the Golden Triangle business district located in the south of the city contains numerous tall glass and steel office buildings, shopping complexes and apartment buildings for the wealthy. The people who live and work in these buildings are as rich and powerful as their counterparts in the United States or Europe. The gap between the



lives of these people and the destitution of the poor is almost unimaginable. While government reforms have aided the growing middle class and have allowed these people to reap some

of these benefits for themselves, the poor live much as they always have.

Many among Jakarta's urban poor resent the existence of shopping complexes with security person-

nel hired to keep out peddlers and other members of the lower class. Similarly, the sight of a corporate official driving the streets in a new hypercombustion car often breeds resentment in the heart of someone who pulls tourists around the city in a two-wheeled becak, using his own legs for power.

Important Features

Like most members of the elite, few novas ever see the poorer parts of Jakarta except from the windows of a car or other vehicle. All the violence, petty crime, suffering and murder endemic to a Third World city can be found here.

Unknown to most outsiders, the Indonesian government has extensive dealings with both the Heaven Thunder Triad and Japan's Nakato Yakuza. In her constant effort to bring money into her nation and into her own pockets, Indonesia's Prime Minister Inam Sutowow supports smuggling in new technologies and industrial secrets from Japan, China and the United States. Since 2007, Golden Bell Industries has been manufacturing low-cost hypercombustion engines and superconducting batteries for sale in Southeast Asia and India. The plans for the batteries were smuggled out of Tokyo by the Nakato Yakuza, and the Heaven Thunder Triad supplied Indonesian industries with details on constructing hypercombustion engines. These efforts have brought increased prosperity into Indonesia and great wealth to the officials involved, but they have also further deepened the alliance between the Indonesian government and organized crime. Inside the lovely government buildings and gleaming corporate towers, blackmail, bribery and many similar practices flourish.

Within the past year, Project Utopia has asked some of its novas and other agents to investigate nova activities in Indonesia. However, many Indonesian novas distrust foreigners, especially wealthy foreigners. Project Utopia agents have also found evidence of connections between the Indonesian government and various branches of Asian organized crime. T2M is determined to help expose these connections and drive the Heaven Thunder Triad out of Jakarta.

Count Orzaiz of the Teragen has contacted Prime Minister Sutowow and has begun initial inquiries about obtaining one of the nation's smaller islands in return for a promise of defense and help maintaining civil order. In addition, Orzaiz has promised the services of two of the Teragen's hyperintelligent scientists. While PM Sutowow knows that she may well be gambling with the future of her country, she has been severely tempted by the offer of such an alliance with a powerful group of novas. Fewer than a dozen people in Indonesia know of this offer, which was only made two months ago, but Project Utopia members have noted that three known members of the Teragen

are currently believed to be in Indonesia. The presence of these individuals is yet another reason that Project Utopia officials wish for an increased presence in Jakarta.

Luminaries

Rangda

Background: Taking the name of the famous Balinese witch Rangda, Laksmi Taman has become one of the most prominent Indonesian novas. Born on Bali, her family immigrated to Jakarta when she was 18. She lived here for a decade, assembling electronics in a factory. A fire in this factory left her and a few dozen other panicked workers trapped behind a locked fire door. Laksmi's powers erupted, and she used them to destroy the lock on the door, organize the others and help them get to freedom.

Realizing her powers had changed her life, Laksmi decided to devote herself to help make life in Java, and especially in Jakarta, better for all residents. Today she tries to act as a bridge between Javanese Indonesians and the various minority groups, as well as use her star power to increase Indonesia's prosperity and visibility on the world stage. She hopes to eventually organize a pan-Indonesian alliance of novas.



Description: Rangda is a striking 29-year-old Balinese woman with glowing red eyes. She usually dresses in Western fashions but occasionally dons traditional Indonesian attire and a mask depicting her mythical *nom de guerre* when speaking to the masses.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 1, Command 1, Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 3, Linguistics 3 (Balinese, Bahasa, Dutch, English), Martial Arts 3, Perform 2 (Storytelling), Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Style 3, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Dormancy 3, Influence 3, Node 3, Resources 2

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 9, Taint 4 (Glowing Red Eyes)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Physical Prodigy), Mega-Wits • (Lie Detector), Mega-Manipulation • (The Voice), Mega-Charisma • (Dreadful Mien)

Quantum Powers: Luck ••••, Entropy Control ••



Joseph Latihan

Background: Joseph was a small-time con artist and fence working in Jakarta when he erupted while being pursued by the police. Using his newfound agility, Joseph vanished into Jakarta's crowded backstreets. He quickly realized that, while he was a nova, he has no obvious quantum powers and was also extremely difficult to detect. Using his various underworld connections, he contacted the local branch of the Heaven Thunder Triad and asked to work for

them. Joseph rose rapidly in the organization and has been chief among its Jakarta operative for the past two years. During this time he has taken time to educate himself so that he might fully understand the parameters of his job.

Joseph is devoted to his parents and extended family, who now live quite well. He honestly believes that the HTT helps Indonesia's poor, although he also very much enjoys the fact that working for it pays exceedingly well. While he was quite poor only five years ago, he now commands vast resources and hundreds of people. He has even met with Indonesian Prime Minister Sutowow on several occasions, during negotiations about smuggling.

Description: Joseph is a very average-looking man of Chinese-Indonesian descent. He is in his mid-30s and gives no indication that he is a nova. Today he regularly dresses in Armani suits and is the picture of the wealthy businessman. Of course, given the line of business he is in, he usually travels armed and is often accompanied by one or two highly trained bodyguards. He is meticulous in his habits and has an air of sophistication about him, but careful observers sometimes notice hints of his extremely humble origins in his behavior. The fact that he is a nova is a carefully guarded secret known only to him and his immediate superior in the HTT.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Biz 4, Bureaucracy 3, Command 2, Drive 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Linguistics 3 (Bahasa, Cantonese, English, Japanese), Martial Arts 1, Science 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4, Style 2, Subterfuge 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Dormancy 5, Followers 2, Influence 1, Resources 4

Quantum 1, Quantum Pool 22, Willpower 6, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Catfooted), Mega-Perception •• (Analytic Taste/Touch), Mega-Intelligence • (Eidetic Memory, Speed Reading), Mega-Wits •• (Natural Empath, Synergy)

Quantum Powers: Intuition •••, Psychic Shield •••, Sensory Shield ••

OPERATIONS MEMO**Project Utopia operational memo to all new members assigned to Mexico City, April 27, 2007**

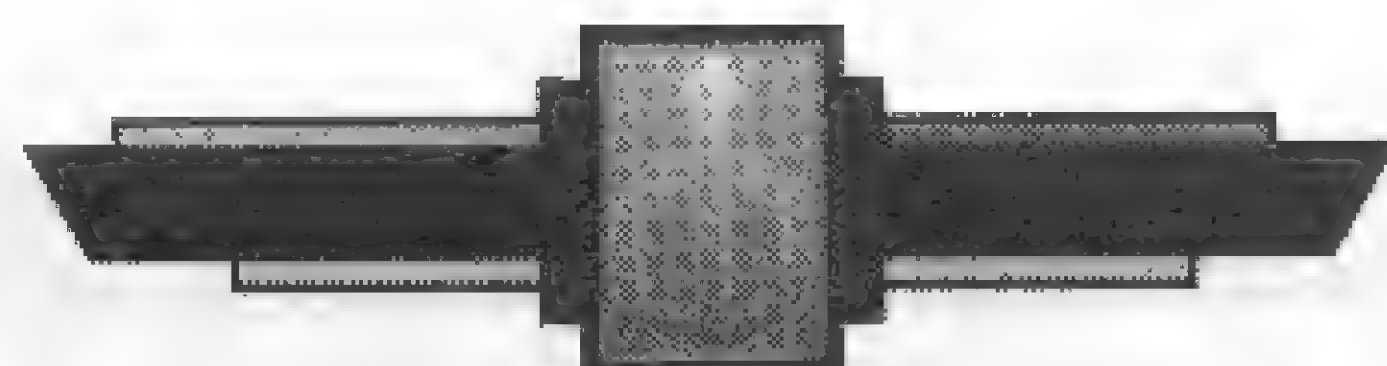
When visiting Mexico City, all Project Utopia members should keep in mind that Mexico is a free and sovereign nation with a proud and independent history. The number of United States and European novas and other Project personnel currently living in Mexico City has aroused local suspicions that our efforts may end up becoming part of some neo-colonial endeavor intent on depriving Mexico of its freedom. Their close proximity to the United States has made many Mexican citizens extremely conscious of their status as members of a Third World nation. While the Mexican economy is moving forward at a rapid pace, it will likely be at least a decade before these feelings of inferiority and distrust toward First World residents abate.

New World Press, 2008***The Jaguar Rises: Mexico in the New Century* by Maria Conssuelo Resendes, New World Press, 2008**

The most startling transformation has occurred in Mexico City itself. A shantytown of poverty and degradation less than a decade ago, this city has become one of the major urban centers of the Americas. The most obvious change visitors notice is the complete lack of smog. The air and water are now as clean as when the Aztecs first settled the shores of this lake almost 1,000 years ago. Equally dramatic are the attitudes of the people you see on the street. Beggars and the homeless are now limited to the insane and the malcontent. Even most of the street children have found homes in the newly constructed shelters.

In spite of all of our grim expectations, our hard work has finally paid off. While the United States fears the power of the novas, our own nation has recognized that such beings have the power to transform the world. Even our vastly corrupt government has realized that being on the forefront of such a transformation can bring great rewards. However, let us look beyond the government now. What matter the most are the Mexican people. We have been given a great gift. Our nation has been restored, and some of our own people have been granted powers out of legend. We live in an era of manifest miracles.

What shall we do next? The first and most crucial step is that we must keep our own identity. Many of us now live as well as people in the North. However, we are not Canadians or citizens of the United States. Their lives are not our own. Our festivals, our



The Jaguar Rises, continued

freedom from their punch-clock time and our pride must not be lost to a mistaken desire to become like them. Using the gifts of the novas, we can make a uniquely Mexican dream. However, one of the keys to this dream continues to be the novas. As part of our continuing quest to build a new Mexico, we must look to our own novas and seek their help. Project Utopia is our ally, and it has given us much. But it must never become our master.

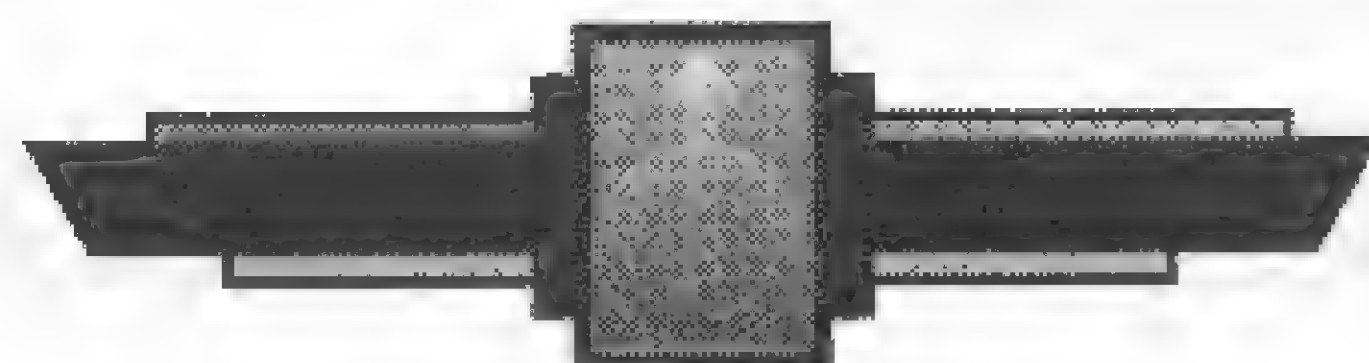
Random House, 2007

New City/ Old Life by Carl Lansky, Random House, 2007

Everyone talks about how different this place is now. Sure, you can now see to the horizon rather than having your vision fade off into gray-green smog after two blocks. Even better, almost no one is starving, and the water is as clean as in the US. In spite of all that, you've still got more than 20 million people who, less than a decade ago, were scrounging for a living in one of the armpits of North America. Let's look at what this means for a bit. Suddenly giving someone a better house and a decent job doesn't mystically transform him into a happy middle-class consumer.

Once you get past the fact that this place now looks like postcards of what New York or LA should look like, Mexico City starts looking a lot more like the bad old days. Violent crime is quite low, and most of the inhabitants are still too stunned with how much better everything is to consider vandalism, but petty crime is rampant. Now that huge numbers of fairly wealthy citizens amble down clean streets, there are an abundance of pickpockets, con artists, gamblers and car thieves to relieve all of these happy people of their money. Sweeps by the cops keep most of these types away from the main tourist areas, but that's OK. Most locals now have something in their pocket worth picking. Tourists no longer make the only good targets. The old hungry days have left many here with the attitude that if something isn't nailed down it's best to take it and keep it in case the bad times return. Hoarding, shoplifting and minor property crimes are endemic. No one's going to be rioting over it, but it's there.

Basically, this isn't like most First World cities, but it's certainly not the Third World either. We're dealing with a unique environment, where the changes have been so dramatic and so rapid that most of the people living here do not take their prosperity for granted. I have no idea what Mexico City will be like in a generation. By that time, most of the people here won't remember the way thing used to be. Until then, you've got a city where lavish festivals and grandiose public works are common because few people worry about the expense. However, it's also a place also where families keep six months of food in the cellar and teens from middle-class households pick pockets for extra money.



MEXICO CITY HISTORY

History

Mexico City is the largest city in the world. Just a decade ago, this was a city of just over 20 million people with massive squatter settlements, almost unimaginable levels of air pollution, ruled by a corrupt and well-entrenched government. Today, all but the government have changed. The population has increased to 24 million, but they are better housed and more prosperous than anytime in the history of this nation.

In 2003, Mexico City became the headquarters of the American branch of T2M. Since that time, Project Utopia and the Aeon Society have worked to improve conditions in and around this enormous city. Project Utopia's efforts to eliminate pollution worldwide have resulted in a substantial improvement in living conditions in this city. Today, the air and water of Mexico City are cleaner than they have been in more than a century. When Project Utopia first approached the Mexican government about using Mexico City as the location for their T2M Americas offices, part of their deal was for radical improvements in Mexico City's infrastructure. Since then, almost all of the city's vast squatter settlements have been replaced by well-built prefab housing. Everyone in the city now has access to clean water and solar-generated electricity. In addition, massive ecological reconstruction efforts similar to those used in the Ethiopian highlands have restored hundreds of square miles of topsoil to nearby farms and reforested large regions around the city.

The completion of the T2M Americas headquarters in 2004 also brought an immediate boost to the region's economy. Electronics, chemical and pharmaceutical firms anxious to work with Project Utopia scientists and novas set up offices here. In addition, a large number of novas from all over the Americas come to Project Utopia's Rashoud facilities for help. The US government's distrust of Project Utopia has been a great boon for Mexico. Today, increasing number of US novas, entrepreneurs and corporations are moving to Mexico City, where they can work freely with Project Utopia, beyond the range of the US government's restrictions.

While the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) still rules Mexico, many within Mexico now ac-

knowledge that Project Utopia has almost as much influence as the elected government. Unsurprisingly, most of Mexico's inhabitants are quite happy to see the overindulgence and corruption of the PRI curbed by Project Utopia's influence. Greedy and occasionally violent governmental excesses still occur in remote provinces of Mexico. However, the Mexican government does its best to keep such episodes hidden, especially from T2M members, who have on more than one occasion worked to stop such incidents.

As a result, the relationship between Project Utopia and the Mexican government is somewhat uneasy. Many members of the government are quite happy with the arrangement, either because they have gotten quite wealthy off of the nation's newfound prosperity or because of a sincere desire to help. However, while everyone in the government enjoys the prosperity Project Utopia has brought, some of the more powerful and corrupt leaders are growing to resent the restrictions on their freedom. As the latest election approaches the PRI leaders are attempting to gain support for a plan which would restrict Project Utopia's influence. Unfortunately for these officials, Project Utopia employees working with UN monitoring teams are planning to make sure that this election occurs without the usual vote fraud perpetrated by the government.

Important Features

One of the most obvious feature of Mexico City are the *mascaras*. Many of the local novas, most local nova wannabes, and an increasing number of the more rebellious youths have taken to wearing full face masks when they are patrolling, partying or committing illegal activities. Born from the tradition of Mexican *luchadors* wearing similar masks, the novas claim that wearing a mask helps them separate their everyday life from the identity they take on while on duty. While not universal, a number of these novas also use their masks to conceal their mundane identities.

Thrill-seeking youths, petty gangs and, most recently, some members of organized crime have also picked up this habit. While Mexico City itself is relatively safe, masked criminals are increasingly common in Tijuana. The less savory elements of this tra-

dition have recently crossed Mexico's northern border. Masked toughs, rebels and thieves are also becoming common in Los Angeles.

While the *mascara* tradition is gaining notoriety as being related to crime, the vast majority of masked activities in Mexico City are no worse than wild parties and high school pranks. Several masked novas have pointed out that the *mascara* tradition can actually be traced back to the animal masks worn by Aztec knights. A number of *mascaras*, both baseline and nova, take this tradition quite seriously. While masked, such people work to protect the innocent and better their communities.

There has been increasing friction between local novas and the foreign novas clustered around the T2M headquarters. Local novas object to what they see as Project Utopia's somewhat heavy-handed treatment of the Mexican government. While few Mexicans support the corrupt old regime, many worry that they will end up in a nation ruled primarily by Project Utopia. Mexico has a long history of fighting for its freedom, a history which local novas have not forgotten.

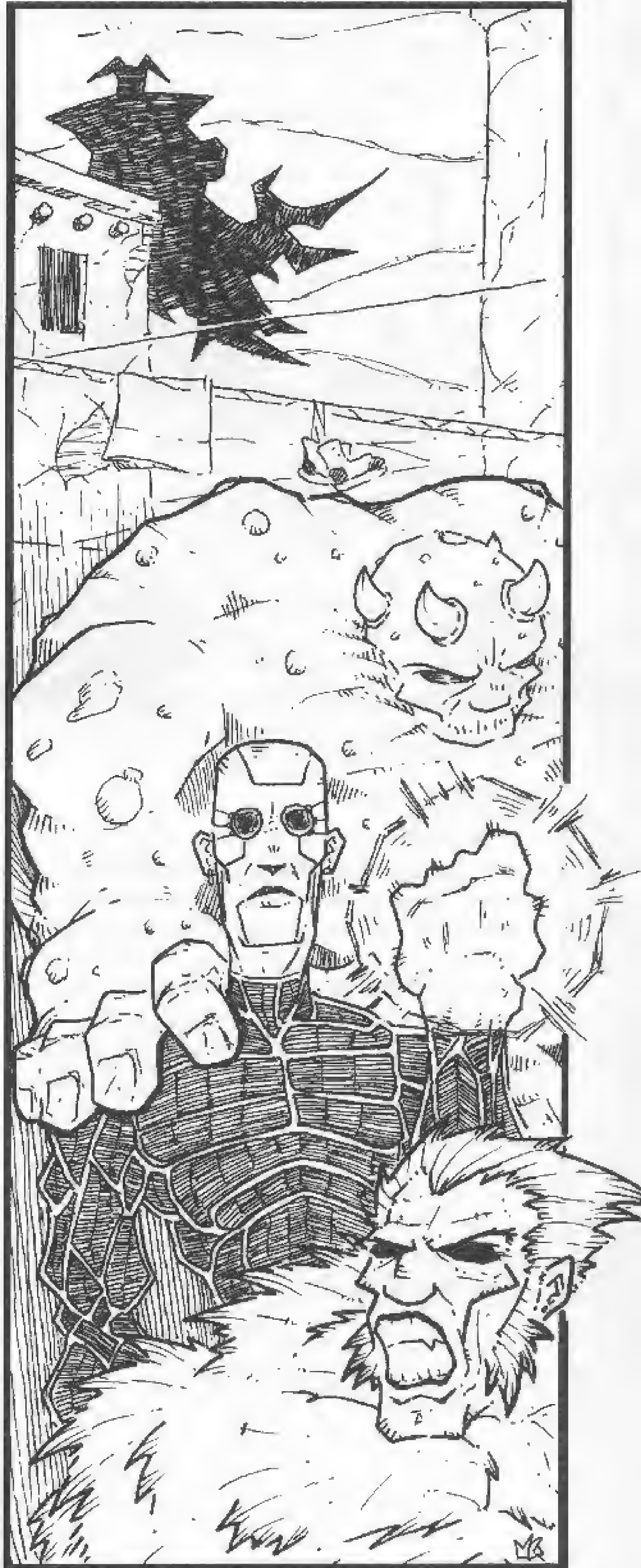
However, visitors notice the city's festivals much more than its politics. Mexico City has always had a tradition of elaborate celebrations on *Cinco de Mayo* (May 5, Mexican Independence Day) and *Dia de los Muertos* (November 1, The Day of the Dead).

Today, nova participation has made these celebrations even more spectacular. Also, N-Day has been added to the list of festivities. Tens of thousands of tourists from all over the world come to Mexico City to witness and participate in these revels.

In 2007, *Cinco de Mayo* included one local nova producing a massive display of elaborately patterned lightning which could be seen from 100 kilometers away. During the last *Dia de los Muertos*, another nova built a realistic eight-meter-tall skeleton, then animated it and made it dance down Alameda Street throwing candy skulls and similar treats into the crowd. In the true holiday spirit, Mexican and T2M novas usually either work together to produce elaborate displays of power or engage in good-natured competition to see who can outdo each other in awing the crowds. The mutual hostility and distrust felt by some in each group is largely put aside for the duration of the holiday.

Mexico City is also the center for Project Utopia's Central American aid division. Currently, almost 1,000 Project relief workers and half a dozen novas based in Mexico City work in the southern part of Mexico and the various Central American nations. These people perform ecological recovery work and attempt to help the inhabitants of various Central American communities obtain a better quality of life. Such activities generally win widespread praise and support from both the inhabitants of Mexico City and

the farmers with whom they work. However, on several occasions Project personnel have come into conflict with government officials in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. While these encounters have so far stopped short of violence, further problems are expected in the future. The governments of all



three nations feel threatened by powerful outsiders coming in and giving aid to often-rebellious rural communities. Even more seriously, various United States intelligence agencies working in these nations have begun to feel quite threatened by Project Utopia activities there. Working with the Directive, these agencies are looking for ways to hamper and discredit Project Utopia activities in Central America.



Luminaries

El Muerte

Background: Little is known about the origin of the notorious nova known only as El Muerte. He is one of the city's most famous and glamorous *mas-caras* and is beloved (albeit with a slight degree of apprehension) by rich and poor alike. Always in the thick of any celebration, always elegant for the cameras, El Muerte is best known for his protective, paternalistic attitude toward the city's poor. This commonly takes the form of philanthropy; however, in truest vigilante fashion, the nova has been known

to stalk the slums, finding the thugs and gangbangers who would prey on the poor and preying on them in turn. These actions only add to his fame as a consulting detective, which is how El Muerte earns his living.

Not wishing to become a murderer himself, El Muerte turns offenders who surrender over to the police rather than simply executing them. Both Project Utopia and the local police have asked him to join them. However, El Muerte prefers to work alone. His crusade against street crime is deeply personal and private. Nonetheless, he works with local, national and even international law enforcement as an independent contractor. Also, private individuals often come to him for help solving murders. He never charges for such services, but he is usually paid by law-enforcement groups when he apprehends a murderer.

Description: El Muerte always dresses in a very fine black suit and wears a full face mask of a realistic, white, grinning skull. He is tall, thin and elegant; most guess him to be in his late 20s. He moves with a slow assurance and is very deliberate in all of his actions. El Muerte is one of Mexico City's most powerful and most popular novas and is considered a local celebrity.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 2

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Command 3, Drive 3, Intimidation 5, Intrusion 3, Investigation 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Style 2, Subterfuge 1

Backgrounds: Cipher 5, Contacts 5, Influence 3, Node 2, Resources 3

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 8, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina ••• (Adaptability, Hardbody, Regeneration), Mega-Perception ••• (Bloodhound, Electromagnetic Vision), Mega-Intelligence • (Investigative Prodigy)

Quantum Powers: Armor •••, Disintegrate •••, ESP •••, Psychic Shield ••

Welcome to Asia: Memoirs of an Expatriate by Colin Southwick,
Simon & Schuster, 2007

Merry old Hong Kong remains a study in contrasts. It's part of the People's Republic of China, the most brutally repressive large government in the world, and yet Hong Kong remains relatively free. Even though it's more than twice as dense and crowded as any US or European city of its size, it's generally quite orderly and well maintained. I don't think anyone truly understands Hong Kong, but most of the folks who live here love it. Then again, where else in the world can you find pubs which serve excellent sake, fish-n-chips and fried rice?

The first thing to remember here is that this place is truly the gateway to the East. Every exotic Asian practice, commodity or vice is available here. There's higher-stakes gambling than you've ever even dreamed of, the finest heroin in the world and all the illicit wonders being produced locally and in Japan. All you need are the right connections and enough money. This is definitely a city where cash is king. Almost every official here can be bribed. Bribery is the primary reason government jobs are so popular here. The official pay is wretched, but you do rather well off of the bribes. There's also a lot of it going on, on all levels. The locals are very protective of their freedom and are quite willing to pay for it. Bribes from the local government to the PRC help keep Hong Kong free, so even the taxes eventually become bribes.

The key to having a happy and productive visit is to simply pay your money and don't rock the boat. If you're wanting to export something dodgy, the Heaven Thunder Triad are going to ask for their cut. Pay them, and they'll help make sure your goods arrive safely and uninspected. However, if you go to one of the independent blokes promising cheap rates and no HTT interference, your goods may end up at the bottom of Victoria Harbor, and you might well join them there. If you play by the rules, all your desires can be met. Whether you're wanting a bit part in the latest action film, an undercover tour of some secret Chinese military base or even your very own designer steroids, you can buy it all here. While they will likely never admit it, I think one of the primary reasons Hong Kong remains relatively free is that the PRC government needs someplace where they can do all the under-the-table activity they need to keep going.

Subject: Biotech Problem

From: Pei Ling Thomas

To: Asian Operations Command

Date: 03/ 17/ 2008 11:23:57 AM

The rumor on the street is that Lung Tien Biotics is headed for seriously murky waters. Personally, I don't care if every multimillionaire on the planet clones him- or herself 10 times or even if they make sure their kids won't have any genetic problems. So far, that's what LTB has been up to. It may be illegal, but it's not particularly our concern. The problem is that I've heard that the superbright they've got working for them has turned her attention to more exotic matters. Supposedly she's working on incorporating animal DNA into humans.

They have also been collecting loads of DNA samples from big cats. Even worse, they have some rich twisto drug lord in Bangkok bankrolling all this. We'll probably end up with dozens of seriously deformed and screwed up kids. That's not the kind of publicity novas need. Besides, the idea of genetically engineered slaves is disgusting. I'm going to need some help closing these folks down and making sure I capture their gengineer.

HONG KONG HISTORY

History

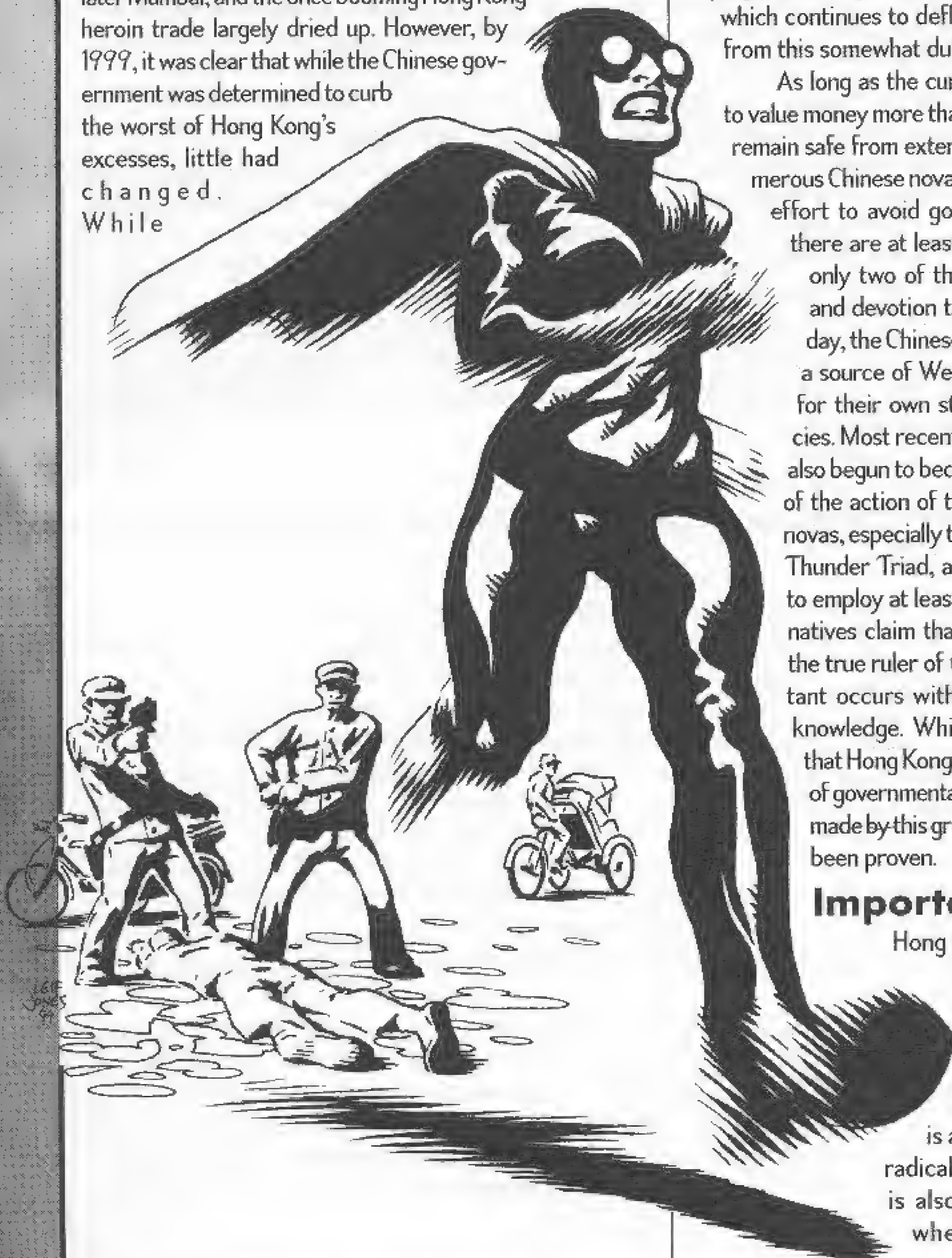
Eleven years ago, the British government turned Hong Kong over to the People's Republic of China. Shortly before this happened, much of Hong Kong's high society fled, fearing massive crackdowns by the repressive Chinese government. Many within the film industry left for Hollywood, and later Mumbai, and the once booming Hong Kong heroin trade largely dried up. However, by 1999, it was clear that while the Chinese government was determined to curb the worst of Hong Kong's excesses, little had changed. While

some of the major players in the film industry had found better jobs elsewhere, many other voluntary exiles returned. By 2002, Hong Kong was almost as corrupt and crowded as ever, and some locals worried about the possibility of the Chinese government stepping in. Fortunately, the Hong Kong business community has continued a campaign of well-placed bribes to high Chinese officials which continues to deflect government scrutiny away from this somewhat dubious island.

As long as the current Chinese regime continues to value money more than ideology, the island is likely to remain safe from external control. Also, by 2003, numerous Chinese novas had moved to Hong Kong in an effort to avoid government attention. Currently, there are at least 11 novas living in this city, and only two of them have any degree of loyalty and devotion to the national government. Today, the Chinese leaders use Hong Kong as both a source of Western capital and a safety valve for their own strict and often repressive policies. Most recently, the Chinese government has also begun to become both interested and fearful of the action of the a number of the Hong Kong novas, especially those associated with the Heaven Thunder Triad, a criminal gang which is reputed to employ at least three novas. Many Hong Kong natives claim that the Heaven Thunder Triad is the true ruler of the city, and little that is important occurs without its permission or at least knowledge. While there are numerous rumors that Hong Kong continues to remain largely free of governmental interference because of threats made by this group, such accusations have never been proven.

Important Features

Hong Kong is one of the most active and complex cities in the Far East. While the Chinese government attempts to keep the heroin trade at least partly under control, the city is a den of dissidents, smugglers, radicals, petty criminals and novas. It is also a wealthy, prosperous city where millions of people lead



happy and productive lives. In sharp contract to Western cities with powerful criminal gangs, Hong Kong is generally quite peaceful and orderly. With the exception of pepper spray, knives and tasers, all weapons are outlawed, and acquiring firearms of any sort is exceedingly difficult for anyone outside the police, the more powerful sectors of organized crime and the military. Even though it has a population density over twice that of Manhattan, incidents of street crime, vandalism and minor violence are substantially lower. Like everything else here, most crime is conducted in an orderly and highly organized fashion.

Groups such as the Heaven Thunder Triad extort money from highly successful businesses, smuggle drugs, restricted technologies and almost anything else imaginable, as well as running large prostitution and gambling operations. However, they also enjoy popular support because they fund large public festivals, provide loans and other assistance to loyal supporters and actually help keep the city free of violent crime. In many ways, the HTT is quite similar to the old political machines that ran many US cities in the early 20th century. The main difference is that if anyone betrays or threatens the HTT openly, they usually end up messily dead. Like similar triad organizations throughout Asia, loyalty is rewarded, and betrayal is always dealt with both rapidly and severely.

The Heaven Thunder Triad is unique in that it relies heavily upon novas to maintain both its profits and its hold over the city. Between the mysterious Green Cloud's unparalleled skills at assassination and Shining Mountain's near-invulnerability and extensive martial prowess, this organization has extensive paranormal resources available to it. These novas are also the primary reason the HTT enjoys such widespread popular support. The triad's open use of powerful novas has convinced many of Hong Kong's inhabitants that the HTT has the magics of Heaven on their side and are both blessed by the gods and impossible to defeat. In addition to the vast array of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian shrines in the city, there are also an increasing number of small shrines dedicated to the city's more prominent novas. Newly arrived novas are often somewhat puzzled when locals come up asking for blessings or make small offerings to them. While few in Hong Kong actually worship novas, many see them all as heavenly manifestations of power.

Hong Kong is also a center for international trade of all sorts and is rapidly becoming the headquarters for many illegal or semilegal research facilities. These small, high-tech labs are under the protection of the HTT and the local government, who both recognize the potential worth of such research. While such research facilities are all new and generally quite small, in a decade the research facilities here may eventually come to rival some of those active today in Japan. Human genetic engineering and pharmaceutical research are the primary focus of these endeavors. There is currently at least one underground lab that promises clones and genetically engineered children for anyone wealthy enough to meet its prices.

Like everywhere else in China, customs inspections upon entering and leaving the city are quite strict. However, unlike most of China, the right connections or adequate bribes can make this process a mere formality. The long lines at customs for the poor and the middle class and the cursory inspections given to the wealthy and powerful and their employees have become one of the hallmarks of modern-day Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is also one of the major transshipment point for a wide variety of restricted and secret Japanese technologies. New and highly advanced weapons, electronics, pharmaceuticals and similar technological marvels are smuggled out of Japan and sold on the open market in Hong Kong. The unique nature of this port allows such transactions to occur with a minimum of official records. A standard series of bribes and gratuities are set for customs inspectors. As long as restricted items are sold to individuals who are taking them out of China, the Chinese government has no problem with this arrangement, so long as they also receive their cut.

While the Hong Kong film industry is somewhat smaller than it once was, it is as profitable and outrageous as even. In the fine tradition of Jackie Chan and John Woo, the Hong Kong studios release action-packed comedies and dramas. Like LA and Mumbai, novas have had a significant impact on the Hong Kong film industry. Many of the more extreme stunt roles are now played by novas, so the realism Hong Kong films have always been famous for now sometimes includes stunt doubles actually jumping off of buildings or being thrown clear of a car crash or an explosion. In addition, films depicting the mythic Chinese past are extremely popular now, and novas with flashy powers can often find work in them. These films further reinforce some of the local attitudes concerning novas.

The HTT attempts to control the vast majority of smuggling and other major illegal operations in Hong Kong. Those operations they do not control out-right pay the HTT a hefty "tax" to work in Hong Kong. While the HTT is fairly effective in this tasks, other, minor groups and even a few highly daring individuals do occasionally succeed in outwitting them. Outlaw smuggling operations, kept hidden from both the HTT and the Chinese government are one of the most lucrative forms of this dangerous trade. People involved in these crimes are always on the lookout for visiting novas with useful powers.

Luminaries

Shining Mountain

Background: Tao-shan Chu was a dissolute young gambler, well on his way to spending his modest inheritance on drinking and playing dice. He rarely won because the gambling house he frequented most was run by a cheat. When he discovered he was being cheated, his rage was such that he erupted and reduced the crooked gambler to ashes. Disillusioned with gambling, no longer able to get drunk and imbued with vast powers, Tao-shan was unsure what he would do next. His eruption was widely known, so

he was approached by members of the HTT. Tao-shan eagerly jumped at their offer of employment. He took the name of Shining Mountain, and now he uses his powers in an enjoyable and profitable fashion. He also came to believe that his powers had been given to him by the Chinese gods so that he could right wrong and keep order.



Description: Tao-shan is the most flamboyant and widely known nova working for the Heaven Thunder Triad. Abandoning the Western dress he was raised with, he now dresses exclusively in elaborately patterned silk robes. When his force field is active, Shining Mountain appears to be surrounded with silvery, crackling light.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 2

Abilities: Academics 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1 (Chinese, English), Martial Arts 2, Might 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Style 3, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 3, Contacts 3, Node 3, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength •• (Thunderclap), Mega-Stamina •••• (Durability, Regeneration, Resiliency), Mega-Perception • (Blindfighting)

Quantum Powers: Flight ••, Force Field •••, Immolate ••

Rick Tiger

Background: Richard Li is the only nova to have erupted on-screen. Before his eruption he worked as an actor in Hong Kong's action-packed film industry. He usually did his own stunts, which nearly proved his undoing. In 2003, in the midst of a botched stunt involving an 25-meter fall from a burning building, his powers erupted, he performed a series of inhumanly difficult maneuvers and landed safely on his feet. Since then, he has become Hong

Kong's most famous nova and has appeared in more than a dozen films. Richard Li, who is popularly known as Rick Tiger, earns an excellent living from his films and from numerous product endorsements. Rick avoids politics and stays well clear of both the HTT and Project Utopia, in spite of several recruitment attempts by each.

However, Rick is also quite public-spirited and devotes a significant portion of both his money and his spare time to helping the neighborhood he grew up in and the poor of the entire city. He especially works to help ensure both freedom and prosperity for everyone in the city. Unfortunately, some of his latest public works activities have angered the Chinese government. He has recently received several threats warning him that if he doesn't cease some of these activities, he and his family will suffer.

Description: Rick dresses simply but elegantly, in finely tailored eufiber suits. He is in his mid-30s, exceedingly attractive, good-natured and outgoing. Although his public works and his acting career take up much of his time, he parties as hard as he works. He enjoys high-stakes gambling and is widely regarded as Hong Kong's most eligible bachelor.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 4, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Drive 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Linguistics 1 (Chinese, English), Martial Arts 4, Might 2, Perform 4, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Style 3, Subterfuge 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Eufiber 2, Influence 4, Node 2, Resources 4

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 6, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Quantum Leap), Mega-Dexterity •• (Accuracy, Catfooted, Physical Prodigy), Mega-Stamina •• (Adaptability, Resiliency), Mega-Wits •• (Quickness x2), Mega-Appearance • (First Impression)

Quantum Powers: Luck •••, Premonition ••



Encrypted Letter**Encrypted private letter from Vasili Klymenka to Alexis Vadivich, June 17, 2006.**

Alexis-

This business makes for remarkably strange allies. Twenty-five years ago, Colin Ingham and I were skulking around Berlin attempting to kill one other. Now, we're working together to save our respective governments from domination by hordes of mutants. I'm writing the following because we need your help. I've heard you speak of those fiery old days and the importance of maintaining order. We need people who understand that. The crime bosses which took power after the fall never worried me. Eventually the people would learn that if the sheep throw out the shepherd, the wolves descend to feed. I expected our gloriously foolish leaders to be back in power nine years ago.

Unfortunately, the present age of miracles began and everything changed. The criminal gangs suddenly have heroes out of legend in their employ, and they buy weapons out of science fiction from the Japanese. We could still deal with them. Like all beasts, they are powerful but stupid. However, then those idealistic cretins at Utopia started making trouble around the world. We have extensive data on Utopia itself. However, the Aeon organization that is backing Utopia remains somewhat of a mystery. Its leaders are either incredibly idealistic fools who genuinely believe in their absurd dream of global harmony, or they have some sort of plan which even we can't discover. Frankly, that idea terrifies me.

The Americans and the British are much like us. Our agents and their agents had the same goals. All that distinguished us was that we served different masters. Now, we have common cause. Aeon and its minions threaten all of us. If they are only high-minded fools, shattering their plans will be easy, and the rest of the world will thank us. If there is more going on, then our work is even more necessary. As for who "we" are, outsiders call us the Directive.

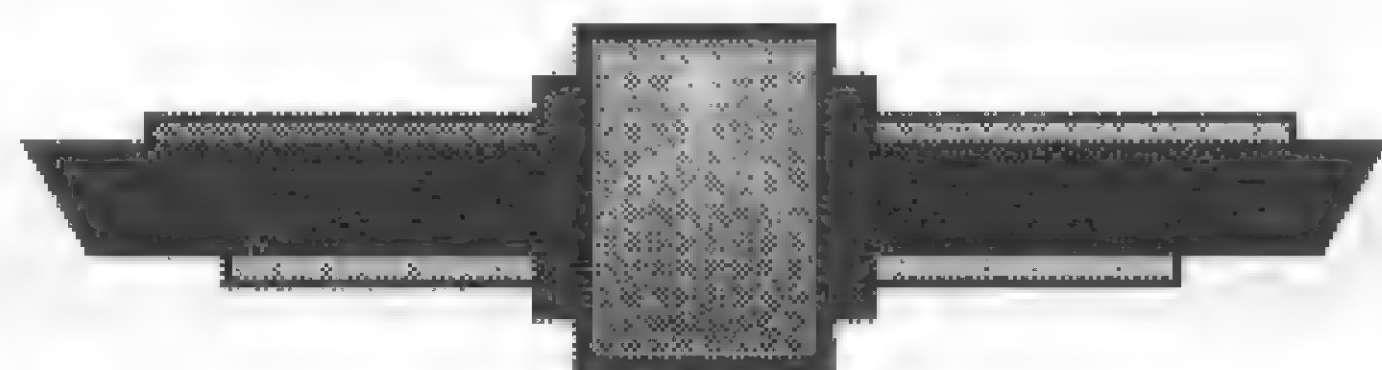
Moscow is one of our strongholds. Many of our old people have joined. I cannot tell you more details, but if you work with us, you will see many other familiar faces. Our nation is strong now, there is food for all, and even the winters and the criminals can't take away all that has been accomplished. However, we must stop those who will plunge the world into unknown terrors, and we must help our own people see that their flock still must have a shepherd if this prosperity is to continue. It's like the old days, except that the stakes are even higher. You were one of our best, which is why I now ask that you come out of retirement. Call the number listed below if you will join us, we need you.

Spin-Time WebZine

"The Moscow Scoop," by Angela Thompson, *Spin-Time WebZine*, July 2007

Real coffee, good plumbing and hot and cold running espionage, what more can a reporter want out of life? Seriously, though, this place makes you see spies even when there aren't any around (a rare event to be sure). The public here is more paranoid than anyplace else on Earth. Some of it's a legacy of the bad old days of the USSR; the rest must come from something in the water, because it certainly is contagious. People look over their shoulder when they talk about anything more threatening than the weather, and standing too close to strangers will get some folks seriously ticked off.

There is no obvious reason for this paranoia. The secret police haven't dragged anyone off in the middle of the night for over 20 years. Heck, the Confederation government isn't interested in much beyond making sure that the famines don't return and that the local corporations make enough to play nice hefty taxes. The best guess by eggheads who study this sort of thing is that most people here feel more safe and secure having secrets. Regardless of why, getting info out of anyone, from the government down to your waiter, can be a pretty serious challenge here. For some it's a game, but most Muscovites simply get insulted or annoyed if it looks like you are trying to find out anything about them that they don't want to tell you.



The Moscow Scoop, continued.

In the infinite perversity of our species, when there's actually illegal activity involved, no one much cares. Buying something on the black market is about as big a deal here as shopping at Wal-Mart. Even the government doesn't care anymore. They used to get peeved because no one paid taxes on black market goods. Then, about five years back Sierka himself decided that God himself couldn't root out the black market in this city. As a result, income and value-added taxes were raised to a level that approximates the revenue lost to the black market. So it goes....

Speaking of the black market, things are a lot tamer than they were a few years ago. No matter what your old friend says, you're no longer going to get rich selling jeans to the Muscovites. Also, stolen nukes and anti-tank weapons are no longer for sale. However, the best vodka is still black market, and while I'd never do such a thing, I've heard tell that you can all the latest programs, vids and music stone cheap there. The helpful thugs who sells you such things are also a whole heck of a lot less likely to rob you and dump your body in a river than they used to be. There may still be nomadic bandit gangs up in Siberia and Cossacks playing warlord in a few remote provinces, but things are a whole lot mellower in Moscow. Many megasyndicate members here may be well armed, but they've at least learned that they need to keep their customer base alive.



MOSCOW HISTORY

History

Even after the many changes of the '80s, '90s and '00s, Moscow remains the grand and aging capital of the Russian Confederation. When Boris Yeltsin died in 1999, the already shaky Russian economy collapsed completely. The ensuing worldwide depression that occurred in the wake of "the Moscow Crash" left most other nations too busy with their own economic troubles to have adequate time or money to help Russia out. For two hard years, hunger and want become constant companions of every Russian who was not a member of the upper class. Many citizens looked back on the comparative prosperity of the early 1980s with wistful longing. "Now we have freedom but no bread" was the punch line of a Russian joke popular in 2000.

In the 1990s, the collapse of the economy and the weakness of the government allowed numerous criminal organizations to expand and become one of the dominant features of Russian life. Even before "the Moscow Crash," these gangs forcibly "purchased" food from farmers for a pittance and sold it in the cities for vastly inflated prices, holding the power of life and death over many urban Russians. Nowhere was this more evident than in Moscow. With other activities ranging from murder for hire to the sale of stolen military weaponry, the various Russian "mafyas" were little more than violent, ruthless, heavily armed bands of thugs. These groups are still wealthy and powerful, but their influence has been reduced as a result of the fundamental changes that novas brought to the Russian economy.

In early 2001, the Russian Confederation is formed, largely under the direction of the new Minister of the Treasury, a hyperintelligent nova named Vladimir Sierka. Using his vast analytic powers, he devises economic strategies that help bring Russia out of chaos and economic ruin. Working with Andrei Srebrianski, the newly elected president of the Confederation, Sierka ended hunger and halved unemployment within a year.

That same year, representatives of the United States, the Russian Confederation, the United Kingdom and Japan meet in Moscow. They work together to create the Directive, a multinational intelligence agency, whose primary mission is to monitor the ac-

tivities of Project Utopia and the world's growing population of novas. In spite of being a nova himself, Vladimir Sierka is involved in this effort, because he questions Project Utopia's motivations. However, he stresses the need to avoid assuming that all novas support Project Utopia's goals.

The Russian Confederation itself is an economic cooperative similar to the European Union. In keeping with tradition, Moscow remains its capital. By 2004, Moscow was a relatively prosperous, cosmopolitan city whose standard of living slightly surpassed that of the 1970s, the heyday of the USSR's power. As the economy improved, Sierka began hiring other, more physically oriented novas to assist with massive public-works projects. The projects resulted in greatly improved irrigation for numerous dry but fertile agricultural lands. Combined with extensive use of newly developed strains of crops, by 2006 the Russian Confederation rivaled Canada in its agricultural surpluses.

In 2005, in a highly popular program of public works, Sierka used the efforts of various novas, combined with money from the newly prosperous Confederation, to rebuild and renew many of Moscow's more famous monuments and public buildings. Over the next few years, similar programs were instituted in Kiev, St. Petersburg and most other historic cities of the Confederation. During the summer months, Moscow has become a popular tourist destination for both Americans and Western Europeans. In 2008, Moscow is once again the capital of a thriving world power. While many problems remain in Russia, hunger, open civil war and unrestricted access to military weapons are all things of the past.

Important Features

As mentioned earlier, the Russian mafyas are significantly less powerful than they were five or 10 years ago, but their influence is still strong. While increased government activity has resulted in the confiscation and destruction of these groups' stocks of military weapons, including two nuclear warheads, there are persistent rumors that at least one Moscow-based criminal organization still holds small stocks of chemical weapons, which they offer for sale to the highest bidder. Anyone who can help the Confederation police

recover such weapons will earn the government's gratitude, as well as a substantial reward.

In addition to such extreme activities, these gangs continue with their extortion, high interest loans, illegal drug sales and unlicensed gambling and prostitution. While government crackdowns have reduced the scale of all such activities, especially in middle and upper class areas of the city, in the poorer sections of Moscow and most other large Russian cities, these mafyas are still a force to be reckoned with. The largest of the these groups is the international Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate. This organization arose when the old Sicilian criminal families allied with two of the most promising Russian criminal gangs during the chaos of 2000. The megasyndicate has branches throughout Europe and in various immigrant communities within the United States.

Moscow is also the unofficial headquarters for the Directive. While US intelligence operatives are unhappy with this decision, Russian restrictions on freedom of information allow the Directive to operate with greater secrecy than they could in either the US or Britain. Recently, Vladimir Sierka has grown uneasy about some of the more extreme plans of the Directive. Also, this organization's innate distrust of novas has lead to his often being left out of their inner secrets. Within the past several years, the Russian branch of the Directive has been increas-

ingly made up of aging KGB agents and their younger protégées. Many of these agents are not officially involved in the Confederation government. Those government ministers who are aware of the Directive's activities have begun to worry that this organization could possibly end up becoming a powerful shadow government whose goals and desires might easily be in direct opposition to that of the legitimate Russian government.

In addition to megasyndicate members and Directive operatives, agents of both Project Utopia and the Teragen can also frequently be found in Moscow. Teragen agents come there to keep track of the activities of the Directive and to attempt to make deals with the megasyndicate. As a natural result, Project Utopia and a few Project Proteus agents are permanently stationed here in an attempt to keep track of the various other operatives in the city.

In a milieu somewhat reminiscent of the 1960s and '70s, Moscow has once again become the espionage capital of Europe. Some estimates place several thousand intelligence operatives in the city at any one time. Open and direct conflicts are rare, but surveillance and the theft or interception of important messages are both quite common.

Despite such activities, Moscow is now an extremely popular destination for tourists. It contains a world-class ballet, symphonies and theatrical pro-



ductions. Of course, a small portion of the tourists and the visiting journalists who cover the many cultural activities are actually intelligence operatives or megasyndicate members traveling under false papers.

Recently, Moscow has also become the setting for a large number of Mumbai-made spy films. As a result, there has been a recent influx of thrill-seeking young novas seeking employment in the local intelligence community. While most are rejected out of hand, and very few ever manage to meet actual operatives, a small number of such naive hopefuls are temporarily recruited.

Using promises of vast wealth, special training or permanent positions, members of the megasyndicate, the Directive, the Teragen and sometimes even Project Proteus approach these novas with a request to perform allegedly important missions. Novas with powerful physical abilities and no mental or telepathic abilities are especially popular. These dupes are then given assignments which are, unbeknownst to them, usually either staged diversions, suicide missions or tasks where there is a high probability that the agent will be captured or killed by the authorities. Within the past three years, one nova has died on such a mission, two others have been imprisoned, and several more have simply provided useful diversions for Directive operations.

Luminaries

Larissa Shonkovich

Background: Larissa is one of only a very few novas to actually belong to the Directive. In addition, she is the daughter of one of the agency's most important members. In 2005, she was a midlevel operative who worked primarily as part of surveillance teams. When one mission went sour, she ended up trapped in a hotel room with Argentinean soldiers breaking down the door. A moment later, she was back home in Moscow with a blinding headache.

Larissa immediately reported her new powers, and after much deliberation, the Directive decided that she would be an even more valuable operative now. Since that time, she has served the agency both loyally and well. Her abilities make her one of the deadliest people on the planet. Her normal strategy involves days or weeks of careful observation, followed by a brief flurry of teleportation and silenced pistol shots. Her powers allow her to instantly detect any hint of ambush, betrayal or recognition. As a point



of both pride and morality, she avoids killing or even harming any of the associates or bodyguards of her targets. She also frequently uses her telepathy to alter the memories of any bodyguards or other associates of the target, leaving literally no evidence of her activities. She believes passionately in the Directive's aims and is very loyal to her father. Today, she is their most highly placed assassin.

Description: Larissa is in her mid-20s and is an expert at disguise. While she is usually well-dressed and attractive, her actual appearance can vary wildly. She has a fierce temper but can restrain it when necessary. She is usually eerily calm when working.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Drive 3, Engineering 2, Etiquette 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 3, Intrusion 4, Investigation 3, Linguistics 2 (Russian, English, French), Melee (Knives) 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2, Style 3, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Cipher 5, Contacts 3, Dormancy 4, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Accuracy, Catfooted), Mega-Perception • (Electromagnetic Vision), Mega-Wits • (Quickness)

Quantum Powers: Intuition ••••, Telepathy ••, Teleportation ••••

**"Mumbai Life" by
Roland Dundee,
Melbourne Times,
12/ 20/ 07**

Welcome to the largest city in the Old World. Over 21 million people live here, and more arrive every day. Every story you've heard about this city is true. Everything depends on who you are and what you do. For some, it's the grandeur

of the Hollywood of the East. On the top of this heap you have the film clique. Color-changing designer clothing, imported caviar and tiny bits of gilding on the curries are all

the rage. Yes, these folks actually eat gold with their saffron rice. There aren't many of this lot, but they set the trends for anyone who watches movies or vids, and here that's almost everyone.

In a very real sense, everything here trickles down from the opulent and bizarre world stars like Reza Shankara, Rakshasa and Nur Jahangir live in. Movie posters, even the new holos, blanket the city in a celebrity patchwork. Everyone who isn't desperately poor scrounges money for at least a few of the major premieres and vid releases. Per capita movie viewing here is twice that of any other large city. However, folks aren't just content to passively watch the movies. On OpNet and in person, Mumbai residents talk and write endlessly about movies and vids, and many of them think they could do even better than the studios.

Everyone's heard the joke about how everybody here wants to be an actor or an actress. Well, I can tell you that this is not true. However, pretty much everyone who doesn't has a screenplay they want to show you. I've run into more than one of the wretchedly poor people that deliver boxed lunches by bicycle who want to break into pictures. Some of them even try to fob off a manuscript or some publicity photos along with the order of tandoori chicken when delivering food to the studios. The whole town has movie fever.

Once you move further down the food chain, of course, the dreams remain, but the realities of life are very different. Sure, dozens of novas work in Mumbai, and the city has been transformed in a decade, but this is still the same India that had bucketloads of starving people less than 10 years ago. Most of us visitors forget that amid all the glamour and the parties, but the rest of India waits a few streets away. Almost no one is starving anymore, and the air is a hell of a lot better, but this isn't Addis Ababa or even Mexico City. The 21st-century miracle still hasn't blessed everyone. The streets still ring with the cries of cart-pushing, impoverished vendors, selling oranges, single cigarettes, even individual sticks of gum. Once you move out of the well-patrolled tourist zones, the beggars swarm like lice. Government housing and food vouchers ensure that this lot are doing better than they were a few years ago, but most of them still only have one suit of ragged clothes to their name. In Mumbai, you can actually watch the transformation that swept places like Addis Ababa before most of us had a chance to blink twice.

Everyone knows what's going on, and everyone has their own explanation. The most popular local credo is that avatars of the gods now walk the earth. With several hundred gods hanging out in India, it seems only natural that the lives of ordinary people would be going through some changes. For all I know, they're right; I sure don't have a better answer. If nothing else, the widespread belief in novas' divinity seems to help people adapt to things pretty well. The accepted belief is that since virtue is rewarded, you keep on plugging and life will just keep getting better. So far they've been right. I guess the novas here don't mind this sort of thing much either. I stayed in Mumbai for six months and only saw one small anti-nova demonstration. It ended when locals started throwing bottles and rotten fruit at the protesters. Talking nasty about the gods isn't any too popular here.

MUMBAI HISTORY

History

Known as Bombay until 1996, Mumbai remains India's largest and most cosmopolitan city. Utopia's environmental cleanups of the last decade have largely eliminated Mumbai's enormous levels of air pollution, and the activities of local novas have provided clean water and (somewhat) better housing for the poorest residents. In addition, poverty here has continuously declined over the last decade. A general attitude of optimism pervades even the poorest neighborhoods. Most residents treasure the hope that in a decade their lives will be even better, and even members of the poorest castes dream of possible "rebirth" as a nova.

The last decade has brought worldwide fame to Mumbai. As the Los Angeles film studios remained stuck in the past and unresponsive to the preferences of non-US audiences, the large Mumbai film industry continued to grow, finally surpassing Los Angeles in both film production and film revenues in 2004.

The population of the city also continued to grow. Drawn by a booming economy, dreams of stardom or a simple desire to live in a highly cosmopolitan city, people from all over India and, to a lesser extent, from all over the world have flocked here. Over six million people moved here in the last decade, making it one of the largest cities on Earth. Drawn by the movie industry and the city itself, almost a dozen novas also moved here. Today, there are 26 novas in Mumbai.



Important Features

Despite all the changes that have come to Mumbai, it remains a city where over 30% of the population lacks electricity. The economy of the city is booming, and improved social services means that no one starves anymore, but one third of the city's inhabitants still live in dire poverty. In a breakdown typical of modern India, another third of the population are working class, and the final third are middle class or wealthy. However, in spite of the city's vast income disparity, violence and social tension are considerably lower than in most large cities of the United States. Centuries of living in crowded conditions, combined with strict gun-control laws and a great degree of tolerance, means that the violent crime found in many First World slums are significantly less common here. However, property crime, especially pickpocketing and burglary, is endemic, so visitors are advised to guard their valuables. Mumbai's traffic easily rivals that of pre time zone Los Angeles. Traffic downtown has become bad enough that buses no longer even attempt the journey. Only local trains, taxis and bicycles now brave the horrendous congestion.

Long the center of the Indian film industry, Bollywood (as it is affectionately known) is now the movie capital of the world. More films are made here than anywhere else, including Los Angeles. While Hong Kong continues to release numerous action-adventure and action-comedy films, it experiences stiff competition from Mumbai. Also, Mumbai dominates the world in comedies, dramas, science fiction, fantasy and horror films. Its yearly film revenues are now significantly greater than the combined film revenues of Los Angeles and Hong Kong. While many in the United States still dream of Hollywood and continue to prefer Hollywood movies, the rest of the world, from London to Tokyo, prefers Mumbai-made pictures. One reason for the popularity of these films is the heavy use of nova-generated special effects in their production. While the Hong Kong movie industry has several prominent nova actors, Bollywood has a total of nine nova actors, stunt-people and special effects providers, more than in either Hollywood or Hong Kong.

The prevalence of novas in Mumbai, combined with the lack of a significant Project Utopia, Directive or Teragen presence has made this city a unique haven for independent novas. This city is the center for individualist and corporate nova activities and may well become the unofficial headquarters for the Aberrants. Of course, this increasing level of unaffiliated nova activity has been drawing the attention of Project Utopia, Proteus, the Directive and the Teragen.

Whether Mumbai's novas will retain their independent status or will end up being recruited or pressured into one of these organizations remains to be seen. For the present, it is not uncommon to see heated discussions and even semi-official meetings by various independent novas and their baseline acquaintances to discuss the various large organizations which have taken an interest in the novas. In part, this independent political atmosphere comes out of the pride most Indians take in their independence and the powerful legacy of Mahatma Gandhi. Indian novas are especially reluctant to be co-opted by external powers, and Mumbai has become the center for nova activity in India. Many of India's several hundred novas are eagerly following the debates and activities currently going on in Mumbai.

Luminaries

Rakshasa

Background: Indira Shastri used to work as a minor fashion model in Mumbai. She dreamed of becoming an actor, but never got a break. When auditioning for a minor part in a high-budget, historical costume-drama, she realized that since she was now



almost 30 she would have few additional chances to break into movies. The stress of this realization triggered her eruption just as she began to read her lines. In her fright, she dissolved into mist in from of the director. When she reformed, she was lovelier than ever before. Even better, in an instant she could look like whomever or even whatever she wished. Her career was born in that moment. She called herself Rakshasa, after a mythic shapeshifting demon, largely because she liked the name. She rapidly became one of the most famous actresses in Mumbai.

Today she plays characters of all types: men or women, even aliens, gods or magical beings. She particularly loves playing fantasy roles which allow her to shift her shape on screen. Her recent remake of *Cat People* was a stunning success, receiving both critical and popular acclaim.

Of course, her abilities also drew notice from other quarters. Given the high level of nova activity in Mumbai, Project Utopia wanted to have someone who could help them discretely keep track of important events. They approached her, and playing off of her desire to be important, they convinced her to help them spy on various potentially troublesome groups. Often, she takes the form of a small bird or even an insect and goes to listen to or observe her assigned

targets. She does not actually work for Project Utopia, and her employment as their special agent is kept highly secret.

Description: Indira Shastri is a stunningly lovely 33-year-old Indian woman. She is quite wealthy and dresses well. She enjoys publicity and popular acclaim, but she also values her privacy. When she is not working on films or for Project Utopia, she regularly takes on the appearance of someone else and enjoys living the life of a wealthy, but unknown citizen of Mumbai.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Drive 1, Engineering 3, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 2, Intrusion 2, Linguistics 1 (Hindi, English), Martial Arts 2, Rapport 2, Streetwise 1, Style 2, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Attunement 2, Cipher 3, Contacts 3, Dormancy 3, Followers 3, Influence 4, Node 2, Resources 4

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 5, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability), Mega-Appearance • • (Copycat), Mega-Charisma • (Seductive)

Quantum Powers: Shapeshift • • • •



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Newsweek,
1/ 03/ 2008"Eruption of Wonder:
Science in the Nova Age"
by Dr. Paul Tandy

In the 10 years since the *Galatea* explosion and the first appearance of the novas, science and technology have advanced dramatically. Many of these advances came about because of the quantum-augmented genius of nova scientists and engineers such as Zushima, Kasheyev and Artifex. Some have even wondered what role "mere humans" have left to play in science.

No one needs to worry. No matter how dramatic advances such as the Zushima macrobe or the hypercombustion engine may seem, these technologies built upon decades of quiet research by hundreds of scientists around the world. Nova scientists merely speed up the process of discovery and invention. Isaac Newton — still the greatest scientific genius in history despite being "only human" — put it best when he said, "If I have seen further than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants."

The technological feats of the last 10 years seem miraculous, but they were all theorized by 1998. Without the novas, surely we would not have had them so quickly — but we would have had them eventually. The real question is whether we would have had the wisdom and political will to develop them soon enough to avert the environmental and medical disasters which were also readily apparent in 1998....

Scientific Speculation

Contrary to the more extravagant science-fiction stories, new technologies very seldom appear from nowhere as the product of one transcendent genius. They come as the result of decades of experimentation. The resulting gadgets only surprise people who weren't paying attention. Science-fiction writers accurately described atomic fission bombs 10 years before Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Robert Goddard, Hermann Oberth and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky produced detailed plans for moon rockets decades before the Apollo landing; Charles Babbage laid down the principles of computers in the 1820s.

Most of the "future tech" described here comes directly from research done in laboratories today. Nearly every item in these pages could plausibly exist within the next 20-50 years.

The technology that will change our lives does not have to come as a surprise. You don't have to read science magazines; even a decent daily newspaper will report on new discoveries. Once you know that something is possible, you can decide whether or not you find it desirable. Do you *want* genetically engineered crops, robot weapons or suborbital jets? In the end, neither the scientists nor the generals, politicians or business tycoons decide what technologies will succeed or fail; society as a whole decides what it will permit.

Learn your choices. After all, it's your future. (Besides, there's some mind-bogglingly cool stuff going on!)

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Synthetic Transplant Organs

Science Explorer, July, 2008

"Triton Foundation Tests New Synthetic Kidney"
by James Ganong

In August of this year, six men and four women at the Triton Foundation's mammoth Atlanta Mediplex will become the first patients to receive an experimental synthetic kidney.

Synthetic organs are nothing new for the celebrated medical organization. In 2001, Triton stunned the world with the first implantation of a synthetic bladder and followed this feat in 2002 with a synthetic pancreas — the first true cure for diabetes. Indeed, the first synthesized organ — an ear — was grown on the back of a mouse in 1997. Triton researcher Dr. Shelley Mylius explained, however, why the kidney represented an advance in the science of synthesizing organs for transplant.

"Structurally, the kidney is very complex," she told reporters at an Atlanta press conference. "Beneath its smooth exterior, the human kidney contains intricately folded sheets of cells that extract waste products from the blood. Until now, we couldn't pack a large enough surface area into a small enough volume. We're confident, though, that our new kidney will work almost as well as nature's own."

Ever since 2001, synthetic organs have revolutionized transplant surgery. Organs transplanted from other persons always carried some risk of tissue rejection unless the donor was an identical twin. Patients had to take drugs to suppress their immune systems — and that made them easy prey for postoperative infections.

Synthetic organs, however, are built using cells cloned from the patient's own body. "First we extract stem cells from the patient's bone marrow," Dr. Mylius explained. "Normally these would produce only the various sorts of blood cells. By giving them the correct genetic stimuli, however, we can make them turn into stem cells for other sorts of tissues — pretty much whatever we want." Unlike normal cells, stem cells can divide an unlimited number of times. As they reproduce, some of the stem cells change their function and become working cells of the body where they're needed.

From the stem cells, the doctors culture the specific tissues they want and spray the specialized cells onto a framework in the appropriate shape. The

Biology

Without a doubt, the greatest advances of the last decade came in the life sciences: genetics, medicine and ecology.

Cloned tissues, genetic engineering and new surgical techniques now let doctors heal virtually any injury. The diseases that modern medicine cannot yet cure will surely succumb within the next 10 years.

New crops bring a new "Green Revolution" to underdeveloped areas of the world — and a better one than the first "Green Revolution" of the 1960s. That "revolution" relied upon expensive artificial fertilizers and pesticides. All too often, this left farmers more impoverished than before.

While we can't begin to understand all the complex interplay of ecology, the great reduction and cleanup of pollution at least preserves endangered and unknown species. We have time in which to learn about the living resources of our world.

As always, the greatest challenge comes from us ourselves. Will we share this scientific bounty for the benefit — and prosperity — of all? Fortunately, most governments have followed Project Utopia's altruistic lead. Even most biotechnology corporations now see how they can do well by doing good...

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framework is made of a substance designed to slowly dissolve. As the cells grow, the synthetic organ takes shape. If an organ contains more than one sort of tissue, the doctors must grow several structures and assemble them in the proper form. The real challenge with the synthetic kidney, Dr. Mylius claims, was persuading the cultured cells to self-organize into the kidney's delicate and intricate filtering system.

Because these are really the patient's own cells in the synthetic organ, tissue rejection hardly ever occurs. What's more, the patient's immune system remains in place to fight infections. Doctors measure the success of transplant operations by the patient's chance of living another five years. When they use synthetic organs made from cloned tissues, doctors can more than double their patients' five-year survival rate. Synthetic organs have other benefits, too: There are never enough natural transplant organs to go around, but if a patient can stay alive for a few more months the doctors can build a new organ to order. Synthetic organs even cost less.

Thousands of people who have lost their kidneys to accidents, infections or cancer could benefit from the new Triton kidney, just as many people have benefited from synthesized pancreases, thyroid glands and other organs. Dr. Mylius and her team don't plan to rest on their laurels, though.

"We can't yet produce good-as-nature replacements for the more complex organs," she said. "Other laboratories are working on many other organs. If the kidneys work as well as expected, our next project will be the liver.

"So far, cloned and implanted liver tissues haven't worked very well. The liver is the largest of the internal organs, performs many vital functions and is exceptionally difficult to transplant. We've chosen it precisely because it will be hard." A similar Triton research group works on a cloned heart.

Other researchers now experiment with building whole replacement limbs out of synthetic bones, muscles, blood vessels, nerves and skin. Such feats remain experimental so far, but Dr. Mylius suggests that in another 10 years, people who lack arms or legs because of accidents or birth defects will probably be able to receive replacements.

Of course, Dr. Mylius was also asked about the possibility of cloning a Mazarin-Rashoud node.

"Don't think we haven't tried!" she exclaimed, laughing. "Unfortunately, we don't know how to make normal nerve cells mutate into M-R cells — and every attempt to culture M-R cells in the lab has failed.

"A few researchers have erupted as novas in the course of the experiments, though," Dr. Mylius added, "So we all have our hopes."

Dramatic Systems: Organ Cloning

Building an organ from cloned tissues is a challenging feat of Medicine (difficulty +1 to +3, depending on the organ). Three successes are needed to obtain an organ as good as nature's own. Transplantation surgery itself remains difficult as well (a separate Medicine roll, of the same difficulty as the cloning).

Growing a synthetic organ takes two to three months. Replacing an organ damaged by cancer takes at least a month longer, since the hospital must screen the cloned tissues very carefully to make sure no malignant cells slipped into the cell culture.

Disulfiram Implant

BIG BROTHER IN YOUR BODY!

Heard of the new **DISULFIRAM IMPLANT**? The Triton Foundation calls it the "cure for alcoholism" — a synthetic gland surgically implanted in an alcoholic's body. This gland produces disulfiram, a drug which makes a person feel **INTENSE NAUSEA** if they drink alcohol! Doctors have used disulfiram for years to help alcoholics "kick the habit."

So what's the problem? Just this: **THE PATIENT HAS NO CHOICE!** Before, an alcoholic could decide to quit the treatment. **NOT ANY MORE!** Removing the implant requires **SURGERY**, and **NO MEDICAL INSURANCE** will cover the cost!

Sure, **TODAY** the Disulfiram Implant is "voluntary" — a "problem drinker" just has to resist the pressure from **THE PERSONAL INJURY LAW-INSURANCE SYNDICATE**. But what about **TOMORROW**? Court orders for a drunk driver to receive an implant? **DON'T LET THE COURTS TAKE AWAY PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY!**

And if an artificial gland can produce **ONE** drug, why not **OTHERS**? Drugs to **PACIFY AND STUPEFY**? If a gland can stop a drug addiction, why not glands to "cure" other behavioral problems such as habitual violence — or **POLITICAL DISSIDENCE**?

STAND UP TO BIG BROTHER! SPEAK OUT AGAINST THIS NEW THREAT TO CIVIL LIBERTIES! SAY 'NO' TO MEDICAL GLAND IMPLANTS!

From copying organs it was only a short step to making new ones. This synthetic gland contains tissue genetically engineered to produce disulfiram. Biologists also experiment with synthetic glands to produce other drugs. As yet, no one in a position of political power or medical prestige has suggested using artificial glands for anything but producing medications for chronic disorders such as arthritis or drug addiction.

Metal-Sequestering Plants

Environmental Compliance Brings Surprising Cost Recovery

MinEx has adopted a bold new strategy for EPA-mandated cleanups of mine tailings. Waste rock from both silver and zinc mines is often contaminated with zinc and cadmium — not enough to be worth smelting, but enough to contaminate ground water as rain leaches through the broken rock. Zinc abatement has always taken large expenditures of time, money and company resources. Historically, many companies found it more expedient to fight such orders in court than to obey them.

In 2006, however, MinEx contracted with Zushima Biologicals for a new approach to zinc abatement, in the spirit of the famous Zushima macrobe.

Zushima once more took a trick from Mother Nature, then did her one better. Some plants absorb unusual quantities of trace metals from the soil and store them in their tissues. In particular, a scrubby little weed called Alpine pen-

nycress absorbs zinc and cadmium. Zushima engineered this weed to “sequester” even more metal than it did before, and to grow more quickly. In 2007, MinEx planted the “zincweed” around its mining facilities in Idaho.

A year later, MinEx can report that zincweed works even better than anticipated! Not only did the zincweed reduce the flow of zinc and cadmium to ground water by 69%, the solid ash from burned zincweed is 11% zinc and 1% cadmium by weight — an economical ore!

Quantities of zinc and cadmium extracted from mine tailings remain too low to actually turn a profit by themselves. The refined metals, however, pay for 35-40% of the cost of planting, harvesting and incinerating the zincweed. This represents a dramatic savings over the cost of non-biological metals abatement. Cost savings are projected to go even higher once the EPA approves use of self-seeding zincweed, instead of the present variety which cannot produce viable seeds.

Once more, MinEx leads the industry in making environmental responsibility help the stockholder as well as the community!

Medibacco

Hey Jimbo,

I'm mighty glad to say that the medibacco's doing just fine. I just pray to God the weather holds. The Liggett man said that they'd finally beaten the blue mold problem, but I'll believe that when I see it. If they've really made tobacco immune to blue mold, that's a bigger miracle than making it produce medicines instead of nicotine.

This medibacco deal couldn't come at a better time. That big hailstorm last year pretty much wiped us out, and the spring rains washed out our soybeans; the banks wouldn't extend our credit any further. It was use Pappy's old tobacco allotment or sell the farm. For years, it didn't seem Christian to grow a product that made people sick, but our backs were really to the wall. When I heard about medibacco, I could hardly believe my luck.

I guess the tobacco companies felt pretty pinched as well. You know how bad the lawsuits have been, and Utopia's lobbied pretty hard against them. Growing antibiotics must have sounded a lot better to them too.

Of course, a few radicals turned up to protest when we planted the fields. You'd think that after the Zushima macrobe, they'd have given up. Sheriff Marston waited until one of them cut the fence, then busted the lot of them for vandalism and trespassing. He's got my vote when he's up for re-election, that's for sure.

Medibacco Continued

Some news people came by too, wondering why medicines should be grown in fields instead of using microbes in factories, like the old insulin-producing germs they experimented with in the '90s. (You can find the interview on OpNet; just search under "medibacco" and my name.) Some companies do that too, but Liggett's looking toward the Third World market too. Most of the people in the world still can't afford to set up fancy factories, but everyone can afford to plow a field. And tobacco makes a lot of sense: The professors have studied its genetics probably more than any other plant in the world, and a lot of people know how to grow it really well. I hear that some scientists want to make coca produce medicines as well — if they can, then all those South American dope farmers will become pretty valuable people.

That's about all here. Give my love to Jeanie and the kids, and don't be a stranger.

Sincerely,

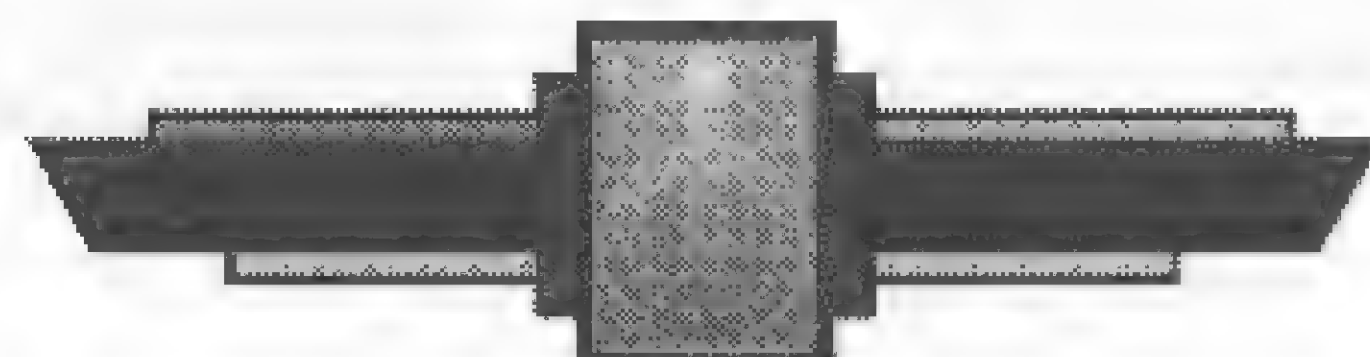
Arlen

Smoking medibacco would not be a good idea: It still produces tars and other nasty stuff when it burns. The pharmaceuticals can only be extracted industrially.

Inventing a new plant species requires that a scientist either transpose genes from another plant which already has the desired property, or create and implant a whole new gene — a far more difficult feat.

Story Use: Genetically engineered plants such as zincweed or medibacco will not directly affect nova characters — unless a biologist character is hired to create

one. Consider, however, that a new plant may represent both a large investment and a large potential profit to the company that patents it. Where big money goes, crime and intrigue follow. One company might try to steal an experimental organism, or sabotage tests so it can patent its own organism first. Anti-genetic protesters might also try to burn a test planting of a genetically-engineered crop. Such shenanigans could easily draw in nova characters — one way or another.



Trembling slightly, Ian opened the box. It held ten vials of white powder, neatly packed in styrofoam. Ten vials of a special virus. Ten vials of his heart's desire.

He already had the saline solution, the syringes and the instructions from the OpNet site: how to prepare the correct solution of the artificial virus, how much to take and where to inject it.

Steroid Virus

He had no prescription for the virus — but then, he hadn't for the steroids or the human growth hormone, either. He'd lived on macaroni, food-bank cheese, sardines and creatine for three months to pay for those ten vials. A store clerk's salary didn't go far.

Insulin-Like Growth Factor. Safer than Mite, the OpNet site said. Non-addictive. Ian remembered what had happened to Roger after a year of Mite, and shuddered. That had convinced him to drop the steroids and go natural. ILGF was natural, wasn't it? The virus would seek out muscle cells and implant a gene to make a special protein, which would make them grow. Fifteen percent gain in muscle mass — at least! Doctors only gave the virus to the frailest of the elderly. They still worried about its long-term consequences, especially for the heart.

Possible long-term consequences. Dozens of injections each month, into every major muscle group. Had he even received real virus, or had the dealer cheated him?

Would fear, pain and doubt stop a nova? After preparing the serum for the first round of injections, Ian pulled his costume from the box in his closet. He stripped and changed into the black Lycra pants, the wrestler's boots and belt. Black leather straps tightened around his wrists and biceps, another set formed an 'X' across his chest and back. Finally he slipped on the arcing mask whose wings rose to frame the

glittering disk of LEDs grafted onto his forehead, right where a node would be. He struck a pose and inspected himself in the mirror. He looked good. He looked *ready*.

He whispered his nova name like a prayer as he slid the syringe's needle into his left forearm: "Megaflex!" He *had* to erupt someday. He *had* to become a nova.

If he looked enough like one, maybe it would happen.

The ILGF virus is far less effective than the more notorious drug Mite (see *Aberrant*, p. 281) but somewhat more safe. Administered properly, under the care of a qualified medical geneticist and physical therapist, the recipient will gain one dot of Strength and Stamina. At this point, responsible physicians stop. They only use it on patients who are so enfeebled that they only have one or even zero dots in Strength or Stamina.

Proper use takes six months and will have no effect on novas unless the player is prepared to spend the experience points for the permanent Trait increase. (Nova physiology is already so supercharged, in gross and subtle ways, that ILGF has little effect.)

Used improperly, the ILGF virus causes a more rapid gain in Strength and Stamina. By combining the virus with intensive exercise, a user can add a dot of Strength and Stamina in only one month. The player must make an Endurance roll or the character suffers a heart attack. If the player rolls a botch, the character dies. Even if he lives, the character will have heart trouble from then on.

Whether or not she has a heart attack, a character may continue to use the virus. Because the virus has diminishing returns, gaining a second dot takes three months, and at every month the character must make another Endurance roll to avoid heart attacks. The virus cannot raise Strength or Stamina more than two points or into Mega-Attribute ranges.

A character that has a heart attack immediately loses all the Stamina she gained and one more dot besides. She must cease the intensive exercise or risk further heart attacks. A year later, the forced inactivity will cause the loss of all Strength gained through the virus, too.

Story Use: Used improperly, the "steroid virus" will affect nova characters. They run exactly the same risk of heart attack as mere baseline users. Fooling with your own genetics and metabolism is a terribly risky business.

The ILGF virus is a controlled substance. A demand for it exists. Therefore, someone will try to illegally supply that demand — and someone else will try to stop them.

Dramatic Systems: Gene Therapy

The “steroid virus” is only one example of how modified viruses find extensive use in medicine, delivering useful genes. Some therapies cure diseases such as cystic fibrosis by replacing a defective gene. Other virus therapies target cancer cells, delivering a “suicide gene” which makes them destroy themselves. Still others jump-start the repair of damaged tissues, for instance, to heal the damage that hepatitis does to the liver. Gene therapy has emerged as one of the most powerful tools in medicine’s curative arsenal.

Standardized therapeutic viruses only require a basic Medicine roll to use. All, however, remain controlled substances. In most countries, only licensed physicians and hospitals have a right to own or administer them.

Some countries, of course, have more lax standards, and one can obtain therapeutic viruses on the black market — even “experimental” viruses not yet approved for manufacture. The more illicit the medicine, of course, the greater the chance one has to receive a defective, dangerous or outright fraudulent product. Nova characters themselves will probably not need such medical help — but their human loved ones might.

Dramatic Systems: Advanced Genetic Engineering

Many of the biological marvels of 2008 require implanting new genes — either taken from another organism or built from scratch. Genetic engineering requires accumulating successes on an extended Medicine roll, at high difficulties. For normal human scientists, original feats of genetic engineering requires months or years of experimentation. Nova super-scientists can reduce the time to weeks — in some cases.

By 2008, transposing an existing gene from another species has become relatively routine. Successfully implanting a gene requires success on a Medicine roll at +2 difficulty. As usual, one extra success means a marginal success (the genetically engineered tomato is tough and tasteless); five additional successes is a scientific masterpiece (the tomato not only resists damage from shipment, it tastes better!).

If a drug or compound is not naturally produced by some plant or animal, the scientist must engineer a new gene — more likely, several new genes — into the cloned tissue or organism. So far, only nova super-scientists have had the genius required to engineer entire new metabolic pathways. In game terms, creating a completely artificial gene requires accumulating at least 15 successes, at +3 difficulty, on an extended Medicine roll. Once the artificial gene exists, other scientists may implant it as if it were a natural gene.

N

HOME

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Computers and the OpNet

In the 1980s and '90s, no technology received more hype than computers and information technology. Robot factories would make us all as rich as Croesus — or put us all out of work to starve. The Internet would put the knowledge of the world at our fingertips... if we could *find* it in the flood of pyramid schemes and porn. Perhaps we would create simulated "virtual worlds" or even abandon our bodies to exist as disembodied minds in a digital paradise. By 1998, the world's greatest chess-player was a computer program. Could true artificial intelligence — the final replacement of messy Man by superior Machine — be far behind?

Unlike biology, the last 10 years have brought a sobering reality check instead of fantastic new discoveries. Computer technology has matured: New computer chip designs and the eufiber OpNet bring us more of the same, but no real surprises. Although "expert systems" find many uses, the dream of a true "artificial intelligence" seems as remote as ever. All but a few cranky diehards now concede that a program that could equal the human brain would be just as complex and incomprehensible as a human brain.

"Uploading" — moving a person's consciousness into a computer — stands revealed as patently absurd. As research into the brain continues, we see that the mind is not an abstract program of data running on neural circuits. The brain-wide effects of hormones and mind-altering drugs make that clear enough.

Virtual reality has found its greatest use in *telepresence*: machines controlled from a distance by human operators who can see and hear and touch as if they were really there at the machine's location. Telepresence is nothing new, but the great increase in digital processing power and transmission speed has made it more useful than ever.

AI research, which hopes to build minds out of programs, and the "uploaders" who want to turn minds into programs, share a longing for a "perfect" reality of consciousness without matter. Most researchers now follow Project Utopia's lead in rejecting such self-indulgent fantasies. Instead of escaping into artificial worlds, they seek ways to improve the world we have. The computer revolution remains incomplete until everyone can share in its benefits....

Personal Computers

Home Shopping Network, 1/ 22/ 2008

...One more time, this is the Gavilan laptop computer with the flexible, scroll-away screen. You won't see a deal like this for a long time. The Gavilan has a 2 terabyte hard drive and 1.6 gigs of RAM and just look at those multimedia capabilities. You get an Allied Mnemonix 400-megabyte chip drive as well as a 32x optical drive, a plasma matrix display and a stereo viewer port for 3-D viewing. Come on, folks, at \$1,949 this is a steal. The Quartonics chip performs exactly like an Intel Octium II 1.6 gigahertz processor at only 70% of the price. How can you pass up an offer like that? The Gavilan also comes with Windows 2005 preinstalled and all these great peripherals: a Mishima speech recognition vocoder, an interior cable/ OpNet modem connection with port....

The hardware has changed, but 10 years have not brought drastic changes to personal computers. They have four to eight times the processing speed and capacity, but the programs are all four to eight times larger. The most popular operating systems include speech recognition, for the convenience of the typing-impaired. Most computers also have a jack where the user can plug in Vir-Gogs or some analogous device. The pricier screens can produce a fairly convincing 3-D effect on their own, although this is not true holography. Many computers also have screens of flexible plastic instead of rigid, brittle glass. Now you don't ruin an expensive machine if you close it on a pen or pencil.

Personal computers have a Resource dot rating of 2. The Gavilan is cheaper than the average laptop because it's made in Ecuador. Caveat emptor.

Story Use: Personal computers are just another ubiquitous feature of the world of 2008. Nearly everyone in the developed world has one. The Storyteller can extract some small irony from the time it takes for the super-duper-fast computer to load "bloatware" programs and download OpNet pages crammed with 3-D multimedia animations.

It's official. CD is dead. Long live the chip!

You've heard the spiel: ROM chips can store more music in a smaller package with, ta-daa, *perfect digital sound reproduction*.

Well, excuse me while I piss on the parade. At the risk of dating myself, let me say that I've heard all this before. Years 'n' years ago, before many of you chilluns was born, we had something called vinyl. These sound-carrying plastic disks scratched, skipped, warped and broke now and then, but they did the job.

And lo, a new technology appeared: the CD-ROM. Instead of wiggly grooves, the new medium recorded sound as miniscule pits. Instead of a needle, a laser beam read the binary information encoded by the pits. Computers would analyze a recording and banish all the hisses and pops of random noise, any unwanted echoes, the breathing of the musicians...

...any hint that a live person had any role in making the "perfect digital sound."

The new technology did end the scratches, skips and warps. (Unless, of course, a microscopic particle of dust lodged in one of the tiny pits.... Oh, dear.) Wasn't buying a whole new set of recordings and a new machine to play them on a small price to pay?

A CD could hold more music on a single disk than a vinyl record could. It also cost more. The marketplace never really had a chance to decide the issue; the major recording companies simply stopped making vinyl. Within two years, vinyl was dead. The turntable-based stereo was dead. All hail King CD.

Now the sinister Illuminati that control the recording industry have conspired with the electronics industry to do it again. Chips are so much better, how could anyone refuse to change? CD players have already become harder to find. Yet I don't recall anyone asking me if I wanted to change technologies,

again. I never heard anyone say, "Golly gosh, I sure wish I had to buy all my favorite music over again."

But what's a little inconvenience compared to the computerized perfection of digital sound? And it is perfect. The human ear cannot tell the difference between a zillion momentary measurements of sound and the true, continuous sonic wave. The equations say so and anyone who says differently is a foolish Luddite.

Fine; I'm a Luddite. I have my chip player, just like I have my CD player. I also still have my turntable. You'll find me with my fellow curmudgeons at a little hole-in-the-wall shop that still stocks vinyl — both antique disks salvaged from attics and new recordings from companies who realize that curmudgeons have money too. We like analog. We like complete waveforms. And though it may seem petty, we also like the old-fashioned album cover, which had lyrics and pictures and could be a work of art in itself.

Fie on digital! Fie, fie, fie, fie, fie!

Data Chips

"Fie on Digital!"
by Dave Petch
Zine, May 2008

CD-ROMs, whether for music or computer programs, are on the way out. "Chips" — actually domino-sized blocks of computer chips in a sealed plastic box, with a plug at one end — can hold immense quantities of digital information, including music.

A single chip can hold as much music as several CDs. This can easily mean 100 tracks to sort through. The chip player has a little screen that lists all the tracks, and up/down buttons to quickly select one particular track. Chips are very sturdy, but easy to mislay.

Story Use: Music chips are another modern convenience of 2008. Only a small label distinguishes a music chip from a video game chip, a program chip or any other sort of data storage chip. Mix-ups could easily happen, either deliberately (to hide or disguise information) or by accident.



N!tertainment

N!terview

N! the news

N!sight

N!tre nous

N!lbyant

N!TV

too it makes

help!

awards

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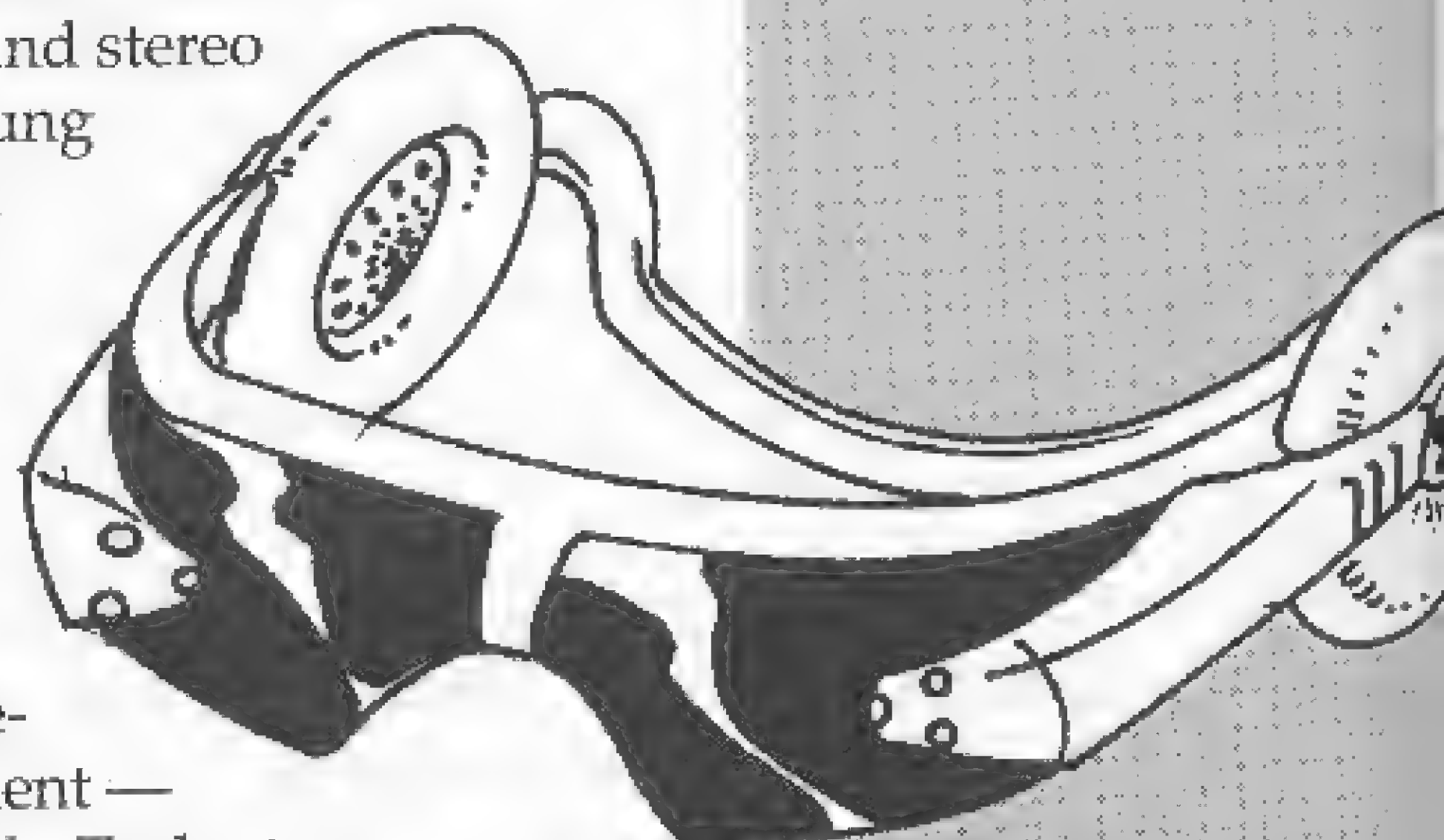
N!tertainment

VIR-GOGS! and NEW! VIR-GOG JUNIOR!

How can you work at home, when taking care of children is a full-time job? How can you be sure they won't get into trouble — or interrupt you during an important online conference? Easy! You've enjoyed CyberTainment's VIR-GOGS. Now extend the fun to the next generation with VIR-GOG JUNIOR!

The old TV set can't match VIR-GOG JUNIOR's 3-D images and stereo sound for holding a young person's attention. And unlike television, YOU can pick and choose what they see!

Telecommunicate in peace, knowing that your little ones are enjoying the best in age-appropriate entertainment — *Sesame Street*, *Theodore the Tugboat*, *Teletubbies 2000*, *Netley the Nova* and more!



And when children become too excited, sometimes they need quiet time even more than you. We've adapted CYBER-TRANCE for children too! The dulcet melodies and flickering light show will quickly soothe even the fussiest child.

Don't you and your child deserve the best in virtual entertainment? Get VIR-GOG JUNIOR today for the low, low price of \$49.95 for a single pair or \$79.95 for two! And remember, with each VIR-GOG JUNIOR you will receive a CYBER-TRANCE JUNIOR chip and your choice of six program chips, absolutely free! Check our Web or OpNet sites for our capacious catalog of children's programming. If not completely satisfied, return your VIR-GOG JUNIOR and chips for a complete refund!

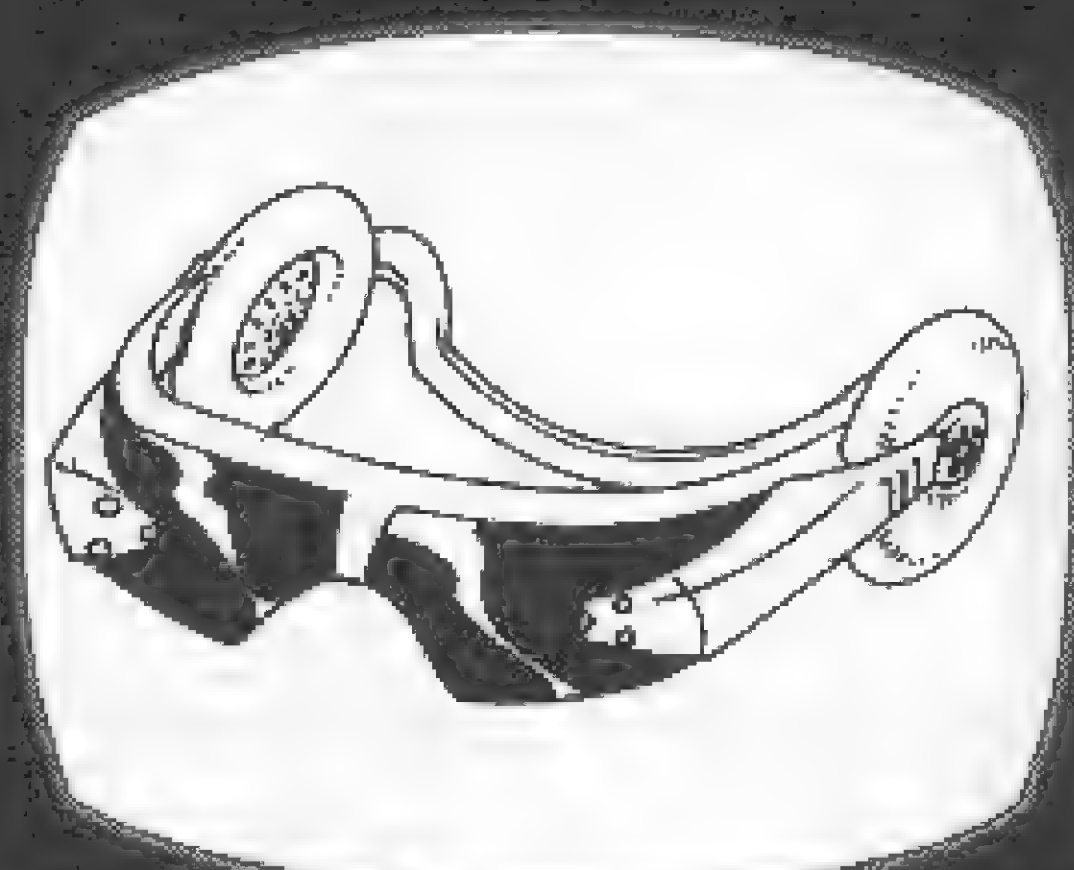
Don't delay! Order today!

Virtual Reality

"SPEAK OUT," PBS, 8/ 17/ 2008



"GOOD EVENING, AND WELCOME TO ANOTHER EDITION OF 'SPEAK OUT,' WHERE OUR GUESTS DISCUSS THE ISSUES OF THE DAY. I'M YOUR HOST, JORDAN MCLEHR.



"SO-CALLED VIRTUAL-REALITY HEADSETS, WITH LIQUID-CRYSTAL, HIGH-DEFINITION TV SCREENS IN FRONT OF EACH EYE, TOOK THE WORLD BY STORM FOUR YEARS AGO. THEY SEEM LIKELY TO JOIN CABLE TELEVISION, THE VCR AND OPNET AS INDISPENSABLE ASPECTS OF HOME ENTERTAINMENT.



"OUR FIRST GUEST, HOWEVER, MEDIA AND CULTURE CRITIC PROFESSOR PAUL NIELMAN OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, FINDS CAUSE FOR ALARM. PROFESSOR NIELMAN, WHAT'S WRONG WITH VR SYSTEMS SUCH AS VIR-GOGS AND VIR-GOG JUNIOR?"

"GOOD EVENING, JORDAN. I CAN PUT WHAT'S WRONG INTO ONE WORD: ISOLATION.



"WE'VE EMBRACED EVERY NEW ADVANCE IN ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY AND CRIED OUT FOR MORE, BUT WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO US? EACH NEW CONVENIENCE IN ENTERTAINMENT AND COMMUNICATION HAS ACTED TO PULL PEOPLE APART FROM REAL, HUMAN INTERACTION. FIRST WE STOPPED WATCHING REAL ACTORS ON A STAGE TO SEE RECORDED IMAGES ON A MOVIE SCREEN. THEN TELEVISION MEANT WE DIDN'T HAVE TO VENTURE INTO THE WORLD. WE COULD WATCH OUR VIDEO-ILLUSION ENTERTAINMENT AT HOME.



"EVEN THEN, AT LEAST WE COULD SHARE THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE WITH THE REST OF OUR FAMILY. PEOPLE COULD STILL LEARN ABOUT NEGOTIATING WITH OTHERS FROM DECIDING WHAT TO WATCH.



"LOOK AT THE LAST 20-30 YEARS, THOUGH. LOOK AT COMPUTER GAMES. HOW THEY DRAW PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE REAL WORLD INTO PRIVATE FANTASY WORLDS. EVERY ATTEMPT TO MAKE COMPUTER GAMES MORE SOPHISTICATED OR EDUCATIONAL OR WHATEVER — TO MAKE THEM A BETTER *ERSATZ* EXPERIENCE — JUST MADE THE TRAP MORE SEDUCTIVE.



"AND NOW THESE VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSETS THAT CAN PLAY A MOVIE OR TV SHOW RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES IN 3-D, WITH STEREO SOUND PLAYING THROUGH THE EARPHONES — YOU'RE COMPLETELY DISTOINED AND ISOLATED. JUST PUT ON THE GOGGLES AND EARPHONES, PLUG IN THE CHIP, AND YOU DON'T SEE OR HEAR THE WORLD AT ALL.



"WHAT DO YOU GET? A NATION — SOON ENOUGH, A WORLD — OF PEOPLE WHOSE IDEA OF A GOOD TIME IS TO BE COMPLETELY SEPARATE FROM EVERYONE ELSE. THAT SCARES ME."

"HMM... I THINK I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN, PROFESSOR NIELMAN. STILL, THOSE 3-D IMAGES ARE MIGHTY IMPRESSIVE. THE REALISM AND IMMEDIACY THEY ADD TO A SHOW ARE INCREDIBLE."



"ADDED ON — THAT'S ANOTHER THING, JORDAN. MOST OF WHAT'S AVAILABLE SO FAR FOR VIR-GOGS ARE ADAPTATIONS OF EXISTING MOVIES AND TV SHOWS. A COMPUTER SOMEWHERE HAS DIGITIZED THE SHOW AND RECONSTRUCTED IT IN STEREO SO YOU'D SEE IT IN THREE DIMENSIONS. ALL VERY CLEVER, I'M SURE, BUT IT'S NOT WHAT THE CREATOR INTENDED. IT'S COLORIZATION ALL OVER AGAIN.



THE CLASSIC PRODUCERS AND DIRECTORS — THE HITCHCOCKS AND FELLINIS AND SPELLINGS — TURNED THE LIMITATIONS OF THEIR MEDIUM FROM NECESSITIES INTO VIRTUES. WHETHER OR NOT THEY WOULD HAVE USED COLOR, 3-D OR WHATEVER IF THEY'D HAD IT, WE DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THEIR VISION, ANY MORE THAN WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO GIVE THE MONA LISA A NOSE JOB. IF GEORGE LUCAS DECIDES THAT HE WANTS TO DIGITIZE AND DIMENSIONALIZE THE STAR WARS SERIES FOR ANOTHER SPECIAL EDITION, THAT'S FINE WITH ME. NO ONE ELSE, THOUGH, HAS ANY RIGHT TO TOUCH THOSE FILMS OR CHANGE THEM IN ANY WAY."



"WHEW! STRONG WORDS, PROFESSOR NIELMAN! FOR A DIFFERENT VIEW, HOWEVER, WE HAVE DR. LIZETTE SPINELLO, PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT UCLA..."

Vir-Gogs and Vir-Gog Junior are typical home-entertainment electronics of 2008. Each program chip can hold up to three hours of audio-visual entertainment. Cyber-Trance and Cyber-Trance Junior cannot hypnotize anyone who genuinely does not want to be affected.

**"WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER
IN MY NAME, THERE AM I ALSO."**

The Episcopal Church of St. James in Oakland, CA is pleased to announce that it now conducts daily church services on the OpNet. Join in a realtime Mass, on-screen or through a virtual interface, or access a recorded service whenever you want. Download our hymnal and sing along, or download a sermon to share with your friends. You can even give confession and receive penance and absolution 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through our private, encrypted chat rooms! The Church of St. James offers every convenience to today's busy religious consumer. It's all here except Communion — and that's only because we can't send bread and wine through a modem!

Join us today at <http://opnet.episcopal.oakland> and see if we can fulfill your spiritual needs.

* System requirements: For best results, use a cable/ OpNet modem and Windows 2005. Remember, God helps those who help themselves.

Teleconferencing has become an important field of OpNet activity. By plugging Vir-Gogs into their computers, people can see events in real-time

with almost perfect three-dimensional fidelity. The video conferencing camera and microphone are cheap enough for nearly anyone to afford.

Robotics

Robotics has a mixed record of achievement. Industrial robotics has certainly advanced but shows no sign of causing mass unemployment. The "All-Automated Factory" is a delicate, high-strung beast that does not react well to surprises. The embarrassing and expensive Honda Concerto recall of 2003 drove home the folly of relying too much on "infallible" robots...

"I don't like it," Lowanda Rodin said.

"What's the country coming to, when I don't dare face the people I ask to vote for me? When I have to

hide behind that —

thing?" She waved a hand at the mannikin. It had her height and build; a technician carefully attached a copy of her face to the mass of elastic bands and bladders on the front of its head. Another technician deftly slid Lowanda's arm into a long, clinging glove that reached from her fingertips to her shoulder.

"We've been over this before, Senator," the Secret Service agent said briskly. "The Church of Michael Archangel has threatened to kill you for your speech about nova rights, and we take them seriously. The droid is the surest way to keep you safe." The technician gently but firmly grasped Rodin's other arm and slid it into another glove, then snapped the glove to the gray bodysuit she already wore.

"But how can I have a rapport with my audience when I'm a hundred feet away? I only see a TV picture and they only see a... a high-tech ventriloquist's dummy!"

The agent smiled a brief, thin-lipped smile. "Trust me, they won't know the difference. The droid wouldn't fool anyone up close, but from 15 or 20 feet away, it's uncanny. And you'll see through the cameras in its eyes. It'll be just as if you were actually there."

The technician held a rubbery, goggle-eyed mask up to Rodin's face. She shrank back for a moment. "And I suppose it's too late to say that I'm claustrophobic?"

"Much too late," the agent said firmly.

Rodin gritted her teeth as the technicians plugged the cables from the bodysuit, gloves and mask into the console. Another cable reached from the console to the mannikin's foot. The first technician made a final check of the mannikin's wig. A flick of a switch, a few typed commands....

The mannikin came to life. Its posture tensed to Rodin's own. Its chest rose and fell with her breathing; its head mimicked the slight, involuntary movements of her own. Then its head turned as Rodin looked at herself through the android's eyes. Together, they shuddered.

The agent held out a mirror to the animate dummy. "Here, practice a little." Hesitantly, Rodin moved her arm and the mannikin copied her motion, inching out and shifting back and forth until she could grasp it. "You can see and hear through the droid," he continued, "But you can't feel through it. You have to do everything by sight. It shouldn't matter out on the stage, unless you want to move your microphone or something like that."

Rodin and the dummy smiled, frowned and grimaced. They opened their eyes wide and rolled them around. "And another thing," one of the technicians chimed in, "The droid doesn't walk very well. It'll get

Telepresence Droid

from City Hall's door to the podium, as long as you walk slowly and keep hold of the mayor. You'll look real buddy-buddy. And be sure not to snag the cable on anything!"

Rodin moved her empty hand again, and the mannikin carefully laid the mirror onto the podium beside it. "I still don't like it," Rodin said — in stereo, from her own mouth and the speaker in the dummy's mouth — "But I guess I'm stuck with it. Janelli! Where's my speech?" They chuckled dryly. "I'd better practice my ventriloquism." Her aide quickly handed her the sheaf of papers.

"I suppose I should be glad I'm doing something live at all," Rodin and the dummy muttered as they spread the pages on the podium. "Goddamn TV spots. At least I'm not a recording."

"Oh, we can do that too!" the technician warbled again. "You could give your speech now, we'd store it and your body movements on the JAZ drive, and you could play it back through the droid any time you wanted. You could make personal appearances without leaving your office!"

Rodin and the mannikin gritted their teeth. Typical cybergeek, trying to make life so convenient you didn't have to live it and completely missing the point. Robots and recordings, ha! She was still old-fashioned enough to believe in *communities*.

Her aide recognized Rodin's annoyance. "Stay cool," she whispered in the dummy's ear. "Think of it as practice for Disney's Hall of Presidents!"

The telepresence droid is not a true robot. It merely mimics the movements of the person wearing the sensor suit. Built-in cameras and microphones let the person see and hear from the droid's point of view. Even in 2008, this sort of "virtual reality" and fine motor control requires huge amounts of computing power. The droid itself is a ferociously complex machine that

costs ungodly amounts of money to build and maintain. Operating a telepresence droid requires several specially trained technicians.

Onlookers receive an Alertness roll to tell that it's not a real person. The fiber-optic cable is, of course, a dead giveaway.

Although the droid can imitate facial and body movements fairly well, it has difficulty keeping its balance while moving. In theory, a person could use a telepresence droid to shoot a gun, but her Dexterity would be reduced by two for this. In practice, fighting through a telepresence droid is simply impossible — any violent movement would rip the cables from the sensor suit, shutting down the droid. Any attack on the droid will incapacitate it. The delicate machine in effect has a Stamina of zero and only one health level. Damaging the droid has no effect on the controller, except for a moment of surprise.

Typically, a user operates the droid from a secure location nearby. As a dedicated system, no one can hack into it from outside. One can, however, operate a telepresence droid through OpNet from any distance. When signals travel at the speed of light, 10 feet or 10,000 miles makes no difference.

Story Use: Government officials are the chief users of telepresence droids. Celebrities and corporate VIPs who have achieved unwanted notoriety may use them on occasion, if they believe someone is out to injure or kill them.

General Smythe-Kemple watched the little tank race about the proving ground, crashing through groves of trees and galumphing across trenches. It slalomed through a line of highway cones and fired at practice targets, hitting quite a few of them. Colonel Pheasant glanced from the video monitor to the impassive general.

"Impressive range finding," Smythe-Kemple finally commented. Pheasant barely avoided a sigh of relief.

"Yes sir, we put a lot of work into that. The ROAV-3 has the best rangefinding radar and software yet developed. The driver hardly has to do a thing."

"Bloody takes the fun out of it. Sirs." Lieutenant Reese did not look up. He would not have seen them anyway, with the headset over his eyes. He pressed a foot pedal and then a button. On the TV, the others saw the tank's cupola spin and the coaxial machine

Telepresence Tank

gun spit fire. A clump of shrubs exploded in a flurry of green. The mannequins hidden in the bushes exploded too.

"It seems to live up to the reports." Smythe-Kemple ignored the lieutenant. He tapped his baton on his leg. "You're sure no one can usurp control?"

Pheasant hesitated. "I wouldn't say no one, General," he replied. "Let me just say... no human agency." Smythe-Kemple nodded slightly to show he took the colonel's meaning. Pheasant continued: "The telepresence link goes through five channels at once, hopping through 50 frequencies, with internal coding and redundancy checks. Quite robust, sir."

"And jamming?"

"One would have to jam all 50 frequencies, sir. The computers and control systems are all tempest-hardened, of course. The ROAV-3 can act on its own for 30 seconds — long enough to resume contact after an electromagnetic pulse."

"And if not?"

"It shuts down, sir. It can recognize other combatants, but not which side. We can't have it shooting at our own men, after all."

"Quite. I would not like to tell the PM that one of our robots had gone berserk and declared war on all organic life."

"Sir?"

"Nothing, Colonel." General Smythe-Kemple smiled ruefully. "I read too many American comics when I was small."

Several thousand miles away, Don Camparelli watched the same pictures as General Smythe-Kemple. "I have got to get some of those," he said to himself. They would maneuver very well in American city streets, and he could think of several... irritants... he would like to point the tank's main gun at....

Ah, British engineering. If the ROAV-3 performed as well as his Rolls, it would be worth every penny.

The Remote Operator Armored Vehicle Mark Three has the firepower and armor of a main battle tank but only half the size and mass. It has the same game statistics as the Urban Assault Vehicle described in *Aber-rant*, except it has an Armor rating of [12]. (It has only a bracketed armor value, since it has no passengers to protect.) It carries a 105-mm gun and 30-mm cannon (see *Aberrant*, p. 276, for game statistics of these weapons). The ROAV-3 also comes equipped with six smoke projectors that can provide a few turns of concealment, at least from distant attackers.

Story Use: Thanks to its reduced size, the ROAV-3 can operate in city streets. That means it can shoot at urban novas. Governments would like to have a ROAV-3 in every major city, though that won't happen for some time due to the minitank's expense. The wealthiest organized crime bosses might obtain a black-market telepresence tank as well.

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Hypercombustion and Fuel-Cell Engines

"Gas-Guzzlers: Goodbye for Good in Japan"

by Jean Ingalls

Car and Driver, April 2008

In 2006, Japan stunned the world with its decision to ban further sales of vehicles with internal combustion engines. This month, the ban comes into effect. From now on, the Japanese can buy only emission-free vehicles. This means vehicles that use the hypercombustion engine or the fuel cell.

It's not hard to see why Japan took this course. Anyone who visited Tokyo or any other Japanese metropolis on a Smog Alert day could see the need for some alternative to gasburners. Pollution wasn't the only reason, though. The Japanese hate having to import all of their gasoline. When they saw a way to cut their national fuel bill by 90%, they leaped at the chance. Generous government subsidies helped Honda (now Honda-Renault) mass-produce the first car powered by a hypercombustion engine in 2001, while Subaru was the second company to use a fuel cell generator (after GM-BMW).

The government gave Japan's car manufacturers and dealers two years in which to sell off their existing stocks and retool. Some economists blame last year's recession on this decision.

Gasburners will remain on Japan's roads for several years to come. As petroleum imports drop, though, gasoline prices are expected to rise even higher — and gasoline already costs five dollars per gallon. That should give the owners a strong incentive to trade in their gasburner as soon as possible.

"Hypercombustion Engine," *Popular Encyclopedia*, 2007 edition

The hypercombustion engine operates by the principles of *magnetohydrodynamics* (MHD) — the study of how an electrically conductive fluid reacts when it moves through a magnetic field. In the hypercombustion engine, this fluid is a superheated, ionized gas called a plasma.

Research into MHD began in the 1960s. Scientists and engineers in the United States and the Soviet Union first investigated MHD in the course of experiments in nuclear fusion, jet propulsion and

Energy

In 2008, commercial fusion power is just 10 years away. So the experts tell us. Unfortunately, the fusion researchers said exactly the same thing in 1998.

And 1988.

And 1978.

And 1968.

Don't hold your breath waiting for fusion power — not even with scientists such as Joaquin Rivas and Dmitri Kasheyev working on the problem.

Fortunately, the distinguished Rivas and Kasheyev have already given us two new energy systems. We also have our natural fusion reactor, the Sun. Electricity may not be "too cheap to meter!" but at least we can generate it without so much pollution. These technologies should suffice for a few decades at least...

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rocketry. MHD's potential as a system to generate electricity was swiftly recognized. Although many trial studies were done, no one seriously tried to develop this potential.

Nova physicist Dmitri Kasheyev solved the many practical difficulties of MHD in 2002. The Russian-born Kasheyev studied MHD as part of his fusion power research for Japan's *Saisho* program of advanced technology research. Kasheyev's plasma experiments incidentally solved all the practical difficulties that had stymied past MHD systems. For this work, Kasheyev received a share in the 2005 Nobel Prize in physics.

The hypercombustion engine gets its name from the way it creates a plasma. A constant stream of fuel enters a reaction chamber. Shock waves superheat and ionize the gases of combustion. Constrained by a powerful magnetic field, the exploding plasma moves at supersonic speed. As the plasma moves through the magnetic field, it generates an electrical current.

Hypercombustion engines fueled by gasoline or alcohol can power automobiles or serve as portable generators. HC engines achieve up to 90% thermodynamic efficiency, compared to 20-25% for gasoline engines or up to 40% for diesel engines. This roughly quadruples the fuel mileage, while the engine's higher temperature guarantees complete oxidation of fuel to water vapor and carbon dioxide.

Larger hypercombustion engines fueled by coal generate electricity for city or national power grids. A slight change to the combustion chamber design makes the sulfur and phosphorus impurities combine with nitrogen in the air to produce a solid ash instead of sulfur dioxide and other pollutants. This ash has found use as a fertilizer.

See also: KASHEYEV, DMITRI; SAISHO; THERMODYNAMICS.

"I dunno," the middle-aged man said. "The price is right, but what about fuel? With an HC, I can still go to an ordinary gas station. For hydrogen, though.... And those fuel blocks are mighty pricey."

"Not as much as you might think," Jock said firmly. He rapped on the sample fuel block. "Hydrogen stations might not be common yet, but remember this: You can drive the Sunstorm for more than 1000 miles before you need to fill up again! Some cars get more than 1500 miles from a tank, though they don't have the Sunstorm's power. Buy two fuel blocks, and by the time you exhaust the second you've had plenty of time to recharge the first. You'll never have to buy a third block."

"A thousand miles, huh?" The customer pulled out his calculator and punched digits for a minute. "Not bad.... A lot better than my old gas-guzzler. Those HC cars are pretty cheap to run too, though."

"I think fuel cells are more economical in the long run," Jock replied. "You'll still want to rotate the tires and check the brakes, but the engine itself is all electrochemical. No moving parts so nothing to wear out, see?"

Jock sensed the customer wavering. Did he have a family? Jock decided to take a chance that he did. "Fuel cells are safer, too. Say 'hydrogen' and everybody thinks 'Hindenburg,' but once the gas is absorbed into the fuel block, it's perfectly safe. You'd need a blowtorch just to set it on fire and even then it'd burn slowly. With an HC car, you still have gallons of gasoline or alcohol under your hood. Gallons of *explosive rocket fuel*. You get in a wreck, God forbid, that fuel leaks out and your car is in a *pool of fire*. You want your kids in a situation like that?

"No sir, the Sunstorm may have a lot of horses under the hood but the fuel cell makes her as safe a car as you can get."

The man asked a few more questions, but Jock saw the look in his eyes. He had a sale.

Car Dealership, Topeka, 1/ 17/ 2008

The Rivas fuel cell reacts hydrogen with oxygen from the air to generate electricity. The electricity powers the car. The "engine" — really a generator — makes no sound at all and has no exhaust but water.

As a gas, hydrogen is extremely explosive. Therefore, the hydrogen is stored in a block of special metal powder that can absorb many times its own volume of the gas. Even if the block is set on fire, the hydrogen can only escape slowly. Fuel blocks cost hundreds of dollars and take more than an hour to recharge with hydrogen, but they can be used many times. This limits fuel-cell cars to people who are middle-class or wealthier.

As with MHD, fuel-cell technology dates back decades. Joaquín Rivas' accomplishment was to solve the various technical difficulties to make it work commercially.

Story Use: Many nova characters will still need a car.

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AMMAN — In the strongest statement yet by the Jordanian government, Defense Minister Selim al-Hadar blamed Iraq for the attack on Aqaba six days ago.

"Someone had to pay this... 'Salvo' to destroy our solar hydrogen plant," al-Hadar said in a press conference. "Recent intelligence suggests that someone highly placed in the government of Iraq gave the order — most likely President Rahman Ali himself."

Jordan staked much of its future on the Aqaba plant, which generated 30% of the electricity used in that country. The plant also produced hydrogen fuel from the waters of the Red Sea, turning Jordan into an energy-exporting nation for the first time in its existence. The Aqaba plant, built with help from Team Tomorrow Central, was one of the largest solar facilities in the world.

Al-Hadar suggested that jealousy motivated the attack. "Jordan is a small country. We have always had to defer to our large, powerful neighbor to the east — but we did not resent that because we thought ourselves brothers. The great drop in demand for petroleum, however, has reduced the fortunes of our neighbors. Some of them have not taken this well."

Unlike most nations in the Middle East, Jordan has no oil reserves. Its comparatively diverse economy has exempted it from the recession gripping other Arab states, while its political stability has encouraged foreign investment. Iraq, its economy still ravaged by more than 10 years of international sanctions and a coup, has suffered the most from the recession.

Although Jordan's King Abdullah has not endorsed or rejected Minister al-Hadar's accusation, he has formally asked Project Utopia to investigate the incident and post nova guardians. He has also asked the International Monetary Fund to re-schedule Jordan's loan repayments in view of the Aqaba plant's destruction. In a statement from the palace, however, he swore to see the true destroyer of the plant punished. He also promised his people that the plant will be rebuilt within the year.

Solar Energy

"Jordan Blames Iraq for Power Plant Destruction"
by Galen Mohr
Associated Press, 04/06/ 08

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Solar power has one great advantage: It's free. It has two great disadvantages: It's thin, spread-out stuff, and it isn't available at night.

Photovoltaic cells, which directly turn light into electricity, can power small appliances such as radios or laptop computers. Powering a factory, however, requires more collection area than is usually economical — except in deserts, where the land has no other use.

Solar steam is another option. In this case, immense mirrors concentrate sunlight on a boiler. The steam pushes a turbine, which makes electricity.

The sun shines only half the time, but modern industry demands power around the clock. The solution is to store solar energy in the form of chemical energy — some sort of fuel, such as hydrogen or alcohol. A sunny desert coastline is a perfect location for a solar hydrogen plant. It has lots of sun, lots of water — and lots of space for solar cells or mirrors.

Homes and other buildings can also use a variety of "passive solar" technologies for heating and cooling. These, however, merely reduce consumption of power from other sources. Only a few enthusiasts rely exclusively on solar energy.

Story Use: Solar-powered appliances are everyday conveniences of 2008. No one even notices them.

As solar power systems become cheaper and more efficient, the politics and economics of energy will slowly change. Between reduced demand for petroleum and the growth of solar fuels, OPEC is as good as dead. As member nations reel from the loss of income, some governments collapse. Other governments will lash out at their neighbors, driven by envy, greed or simply a need to redirect the public's anger. Terrorism, fanaticism and banditry will increase. The Middle East and other regions that staked their economies on oil profits are in for decades of chaos. Characters could easily be drawn into such conflicts.

Fusion Research

From: SBirlesm@fuji.com (Soguk Birlesme)
 To: ThBirlesm@ThaiLine.net (Thanom Birlesme)
 Date: 10/ 09/ 2008
 Subject: Exciting Events
 Dear Father and Mother,

Maybe you heard that there was an accident at the DAIKOKU research facility? Do not worry, I am fine. We had more excitement than we wanted, though!

Last week, Dr. Kasheyev returned to DAIKOKU from the inertial confinement lab. The other technicians say he had some sort of quarrel, but no one knows just what it was about. I doubt that we post-docs will ever know.

As I said in my last letter, we didn't made much progress without Dr. Kasheyev. The computers say we should have stable plasma, but the plasma doesn't pay attention to the computers! Once in a while, we do keep the plasma stable long enough to initiate fusion. Once we even reached breakeven — DAIKOKU produced as much energy as it consumed. Only Dr. Kasheyev, however, can solve the equations exactly — the computers only give approximate solutions.

Yesterday, Dr. Nakazawa decided to show Dr. Kasheyev the plasma configuration we'd had some luck with. Dr. Nakazawa managed to stabilize the plasma, so she ordered a fusion test. I heard Dr. Kasheyev say he didn't think that was prudent. He was right, because a few seconds later the plasma tied itself in knots and burned a hole in the containment tube! The next thing I knew Dr. Kasheyev stood in front of me, arms spread, with the plasma jet spraying against him!

Don't fret. Even if Dr. Kasheyev hadn't been there, I wouldn't have been too badly burned. 200 million degrees sounds terribly dangerous, but the plasma is so thin and dissipates so quickly that it doesn't have time to burn. Why, I've stuck my hand into 100 million degree plasma, and it doesn't feel worse than a hot bath. Still, I'm just as glad I didn't get burned anyway.

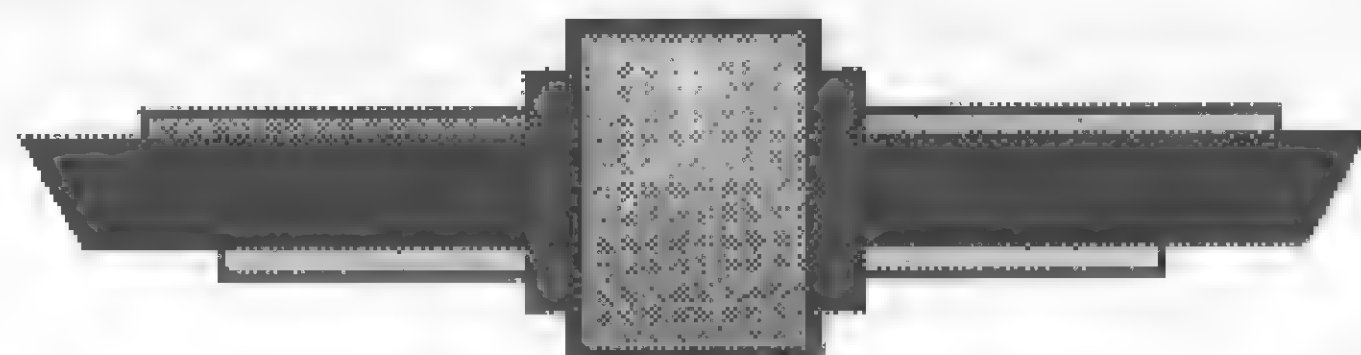
What's more, I finally saw Dr. Kasheyev actually use his nova powers! When the plasma struck him, his whole body glowed! It's easy to forget that he isn't just a genius with the ability to sense subatomic structures — he has other powers too but doesn't bother using them. When the jet stopped, the first thing he did was turn and ask if I was hurt. He's not just a great scientist, he's a good man too.

Neither of us were hurt. Dr. Kasheyev's suit wasn't even scorched. We both still went to the doctor, though. I accepted the doctor's offer that I go home for the rest of the day. I was so lightheaded from excitement that I doubt I could have done much useful work anyway. Today I came to work just the same as always. No one will talk about the accident except in terms of how we can prevent it from happening again.

That's all for now. I remember you in my prayers and trust you will remember me in yours.
 Your loving and dutiful son,
 Soguk

Several nations have nuclear fusion research programs. Two sorts of test reactors exist: safe, reliable reactors that never reach breakeven and unstable, super-advanced reactors that sometimes reach breakeven for short periods but are equally likely to explode.

Story Use: Scientist characters might have erupted at a fusion lab. Nova characters with energy-manipulation powers might receive invitations to have their powers tested at a fusion lab, in hopes that they might supply some clue to stabilizing the nuclear plasma.



Transportation

For most of us, personal transportation has not changed much in the last 10 years. We still drive cars, even if the engine works differently. Thanks to those new engines and high-tech materials discovered by novas, however, some old dreams have come true....

When Officers Gordoni and Cheung emerged from the donut shop, they

found four teenagers hovering around their squadcar. The two cops sighed in unison; they were used to this.

"Hey! No getting your handprints on the car!" Gordoni called.

Flying Car

**Brooklyn, Dunkin'
Donuts Parking
Lot, 10/ 01/ 2007**

The four teens jumped back guiltily. "We weren't touching or nothing," one protested. "We were just looking."

"I know," Gordoni said. "I'm just yanking your chain. You never saw a Peregrine up close, right?"

"Uh, yeah," the first speaker replied. "I only saw them at a distance before and well.... Damn! I wish I had a flying car!"

"It's not fair," a girl with curly blond hair protested. "Why do only cops get to drive Peregrines? We got rights too!"

Officer Cheung smiled patiently. "Sorry, it'll never happen. It's federal law: Flying motor vehicles are restricted to law enforcement, ambulances, fire trucks and other emergency vehicles. For private citizens? Nuh-uh!"

"But *why*?" the first teen asked the policewoman.

"It's just public safety, kid," Officer Gordoni said. "You can have some really bad accidents with flying cars." The boy obviously wasn't convinced. "Look at it this way," Gordoni continued. "You're a good driver, aren't you? No accidents or citations?"

"Well — sure I am. My record's clean." The boy fidgeted and looked up, down, anywhere but at the two cops.

"Then you're doing better than I did at your age. But anyway.... Granted, you're a good driver. *You* could be trusted with a flying car. *You* wouldn't crash into buildings or stall out at 300 feet or cross another car's flight path.

"But what about other people? You've seen what sort of maniacs manage to get driver's licenses." The four youths all nodded, momentarily joined to the cops in the great fraternity of all those who have cursed a blue streak at someone who cut them off without signaling. "Would you want *those people* up in the air?"

A third teen, a boy with spiky, cobalt-blue hair, spoke up then. "What about computers? My mom's car has a computer in it that tells her if she speeds or moves too close to another car. I saw a show on TV that said we'd all drive by computer in another few years."

"Gha, if a computer's doing all the work you can hardly call it *driving*," the blond girl interjected.

"Yeah, I've seen shows like that too," Cheung said. "Having computers do the driving might work, on the ground or in the air. I doubt that many people would like to ride around like Spam in a can, though. More importantly: What happens when the computer system crashes? Every system crashes sooner or later."

"Well, we have a patrol to fly," Gordoni said before any of the teenagers could

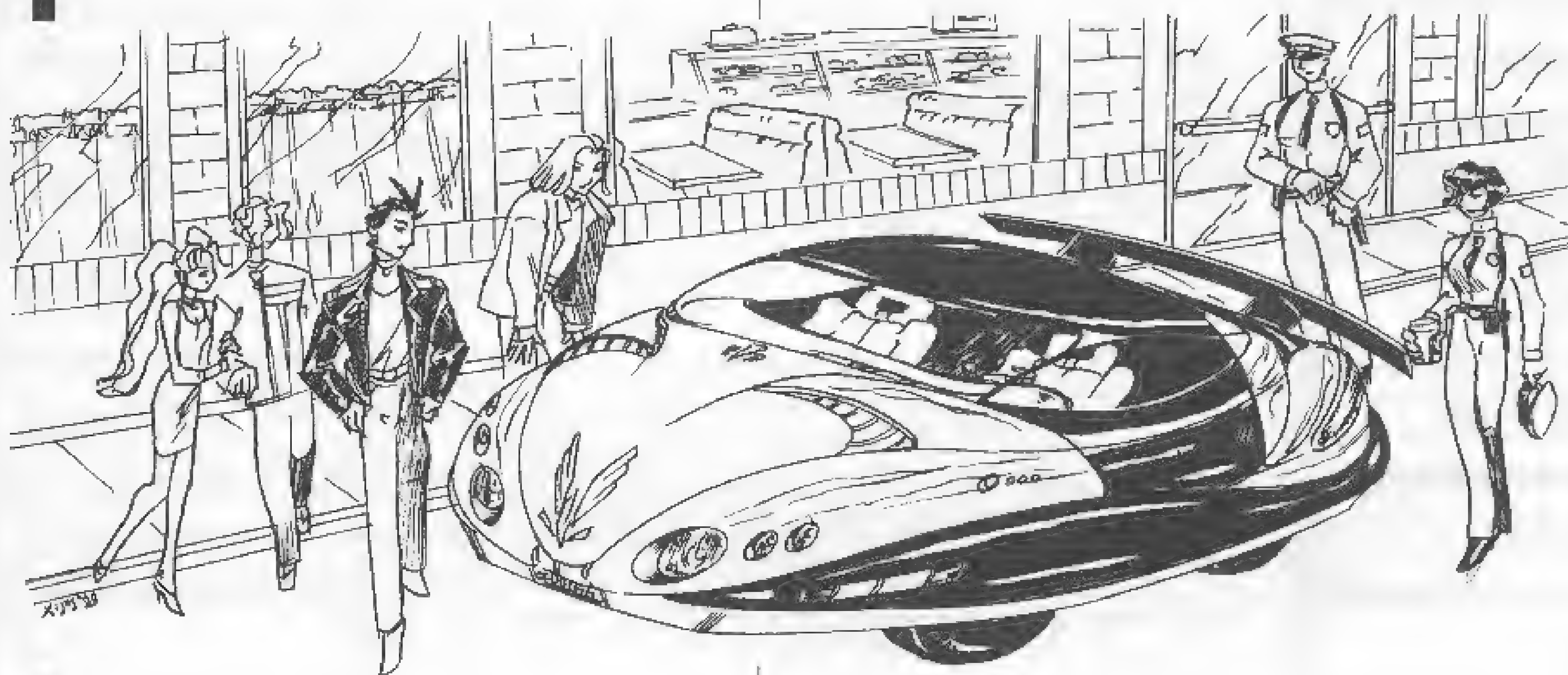
“Nice meeting you, stay out of trouble, don’t do none of that spike stuff, yadda yadda. And if you want to drive a car like this, become a cop or a paramedic. Cheung?”

The two cops got into the car, shut the doors and fastened their seatbelts. As Gordoni raided the crullers, Cheung turned the key in the ignition. Power flowed silently from the fuel-cell engine to the six turbofans. The squadcar lifted off the ground, wind

whipped the teenagers’ hair and scattered candy bar and condom wrappers about the parking lot.

“Think any of them will become cops?” Cheung asked.

Gordoni munched and finally swallowed his mouthful of cruller. “Maybe that one kid with the black hair. He couldn’t take his eyes off the car for a second. Someday, he’ll find a way to drive a flying car.”



Flying cars come in compact and medium sizes, plus a “flying motorbike” that can carry two people if they squeeze together. (Large aircars are impractical.) The flying bike chiefly finds use as a highway patrol vehicle. Compact and medium cars are used as a variety of police and emergency vehicles. Squadcars are medium-sized: They need room for prisoners.

As of 2008, no developed nation has been foolhardy enough to license flying cars for private use. Other countries — and perhaps the developed nations, in the future — demand a pilot’s license and flight control. In some Third World countries, of course, a person with enough money can get away with flying their car through urban areas.

Flying cars have both tires and turbofans. For simplicity, it is assumed that they have the same maximum speed in the air and on the ground, but they have a lower aerial safe speed: Without traction, it’s harder to start, stop and turn. Of course, a flying car can ignore most traffic hazards.

Story Use: On the one hand, flying cars in some way equalize novas and baselines. A nova accustomed to flying over the baselines in lordly disdain may get a surprise when some cops pull up alongside and point some enormous guns at her. Nova-hunting criminals might use flying cars too — they plan murder, so what do traffic violations matter? On the other hand, a disabled flying car dropping out of the sky gives a nova a fine opportunity to demonstrate her superhuman powers by catching it.

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Suborbital Jet

"'Rocket Plane' Ready For Flight"

by Jeff Skagen

The Seattle Times, 02/ 29/ 2008

SEATTLE — Today the Boeing Aerospace Company unveiled the first civilian hypersonic jet. When it flies, the Boeing 797 will become the fastest plane in history, reaching a top speed of Mach 20 (or 20 times the speed of sound).

The 797 is as much rocket as airplane. It uses an advanced jet engine (based on the hypercombustion engine) to take off and land. As the 797 accelerates, it climbs higher and higher, until it leaves Earth's atmosphere. Then the plane switches to a supply of liquid oxygen carried on board, and the jet becomes a rocket. After a period of suborbital flight, the 797 dives back into the atmosphere and becomes a jet again. In this phase, the plane uses fuel only to maneuver: Like the old space shuttle, it uses air friction to decelerate.

Boeing representatives claim that the 797 will fly anywhere in the world in 45 minutes. This means no in-flight meals, movies or even a chance for passengers to remove their seatbelts. "There just won't be time," Boeing CEO Larry Bingham said. On the other hand, Bingham joked, the hyperjet will add an eerie new dimension to rush deliveries: "Fly something from Asia or Australia to America, across the date line, and your delivery really can get there yesterday."

The US Air Force has used hyperjets for three years. The 797 is the first civilian model. The first 797s will go to Pacific-Japan Airlines. Several other airlines have also expressed interest in the hyperjet. Much of the commercial hyperjet's initial business, however, will come from satellite-launch companies. At the apex of its flight path, the hyperjet can release a small "piggyback" rocket to carry a satellite the rest of the way into orbit.

Initially, tickets on the hyperjet are expected to be very expensive. Bingham expressed confidence, however, that the 797 would succeed commercially as well as technologically. "Video conferencing isn't enough," he said. "Business people still need to talk face to face."

Suborbital jets are an emerging technology that has yet to prove itself in the marketplace. Because of this, they are very expensive. Only nova-designed composite materials combining high tensile strength and resistance to extreme temperatures with low weight make them possible.

At first, only business people and thrillseeking glitterati will be able to afford flying on the Suborbital Express. They will share an experience previously known only to astronauts and the pilots of the U-2 spyplane, as the blue sky fades to the star-sprinkled black of space, with the blue and white Earth visibly curving underneath.

Story Use: Characters could take a trip on the hyperjet for the same reason as any other passenger: to get somewhere very quickly. Storytellers can also use the hyperjet itself as a catalyst and setting for stories. For inspiration, just look at all the thrillers set on mundane jetliners. The shorter flight and the deadly environment of space will add even more dramatic tension. And, of course, characters who max out their Hyperflight may experience the dramatic thrill of catching the jet....

BERLIN — Today, the German Ministry of Transport, Construction and Housing announced an ambitious plan to link the nation’s major cities by high-speed “maglev” trains.

Maglev Trains

“Germany Announces Supertrain Plan”
by Terje Locklingholm
Associated Press, 01/20/2008

“This will be Germany’s most ambitious transportation project since the Autobahn,” Minister Kurt Dinger said in a news conference. “We estimate it will take 10 years to complete.”

Minister Dinger urged German taxpayers to see the billions of euros as a prudent investment in their nation’s future. “History shows,” he said, “that transportation projects more than pay for themselves through the increased mobility of goods and people. This was true of the 18th century’s canal networks, the 19th century’s rail lines and the 20th century’s highway systems. This will prove true of the supertrain system as well.”

Germany already has the *Transrapid*, a maglev rail line connecting Berlin to Hamburg, completed in 2005. Although its first year of operation was plagued with engineering difficulties, the Berlin-Hamburg line now provides a reliable, hour-long journey between the two cities.

“Maglev” stands for “magnetic levitation.” Instead of tires on a roadway or wheels on a rail, the maglev train rides on a cushion of magnetic force that lifts it off its track. A “ripple” in the magnetic field propels the train. Because magnetic levitation is frictionless, such a train can travel with great speed — up to 500 km / hour.

Experiments with maglev trains began more than 20 years ago. Until the discovery of room-temperature superconductors, however, maglev trains seemed like a doomed, stillborn technology — expensive, untested and unnecessary. Then in 2000, the Iranian physical chemist Farzaneh Lodhi invented a room-temperature superconductor. Electromagnets made with superconductors need less electricity, making them much cheaper to operate. The use of superconducting electromagnets transformed the *Transrapid* from an expensive boondoggle into a viable technology.

Minister Dinger suggested that Germany’s neighbors should plan on extending the maglev train lines through their countries as well. “As we move toward a United Europe,” he said, “I believe that rapid, mass transportation will increase tolerance and understanding as well as trade.”

Maglev trains only require a few minutes to reach full speed or slow to a stop again. Unlike a clattering railway, a maglev train makes no sound except for the breeze of its passing.

A maglev line consists of a shallow trough lined with metal. The train floats a few inches above the surface of the trough. Sensors in the trough detect any obstruction large enough to pose a threat to the train. Because of their great speed, maglev trains can make only very slow, gentle turns.

Story Use:

Trains are another classic setting for tales of suspense. Like any large, highly visible, expensive public work, they are also a natural target for terrorists.

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Vehicle Chart

Vehicle	Safe Spd	Max Spd	Mnvr	Pssngrs	Armor	Cost
<i>Flying Bike</i>	95/95	145/145	6	2	0
<i>Compact Aircar</i>	95/95	145/145	5	3	2
<i>Midsize Aircar</i>	130/65	210/210	6/4	4	3
<i>Hyperjet</i>	565	Mach 20	2	100	6
<i>Maglev Train</i>	n/a	480	0	400+	4
<i>Telepresence Tank</i>	50	75	4	0	5[12]

Safe Speed: Indicates the highest speed (in kilometers per hour) at which one can still safely perform maneuvers in the vehicle. When two numbers appear, the first number is the ground speed; the second is the air speed.

Max Speed: The highest possible speed for the vehicle. Maneuvers are extremely difficult, if not impossible, at this speed.

Maneuver: The maximum dice pool allowed by the vehicle. Again, the first number is for ground operation, the second for air.

Passengers: The normal seating capacity of the vehicle.

Armor: The protection that the vehicle affords to passengers. The vehicle soaks damage first; whatever gets through can affect the passengers.

Cost: Represents the value of the vehicle in Resource dots. Under most circumstances, only government agencies and hospitals will have legal access to flying cars. Similarly, only the military will have access to the telepresence tank.

Materials Science

Chemistry, metallurgy and other branches of materials science may not be as controversial and "sexy" as biotechnology and computers. Nevertheless, many of the recent technological wonders became possible only because nova scientists invented new substances with amazing properties. Some novas possess a mysterious sense for the atomic structure of matter. The superconducting ceramic within the HC engine, the now-ubiquitous eufiber, vitrium — these and other substances owe their existence to novas who could *feel* how atoms and molecules interacted, instead of relying upon clumsy instrumentation....

TACOMA — At 10:45 PM, a battle between a franchised nova public defender and a Teragen rogue shattered the famous Second Narrows Bridge. In addition to destroying a wonder of the modern world, the battle exposed a dangerous flaw in the "superglass" used in its construction

Vitrium

"Battle Destroys 'Superglass' Bridge"

by Corey Ovendale

News Tribune, 02/27/2008

The bridge, a collaboration between the telekinetic engineer Ardis "Artifex" Longley and famed Northwestern glass artist Dale Chihuly, was the largest structure ever built of Longley's "vitrium" superglass. Built in 2004, the bridge was widely hailed as a triumphant, glittering

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fusion of art and engineering. The bridge quickly became a major tourist attraction. It also seemed to silence any doubts about vitrium as a building material. The bridge not only carried thousands of vehicles each day, it survived the fierce hailstorm of 2006 without a scratch.

When the Washington State Patrol flushed out a Teragen fugitive, however, the resulting battle moved from Tacoma’s Hilltop region to the Narrows Bridge region. Ironically, it was not the Teragen terrorist who destroyed the bridge, it was Seattle franchised nova Sara “Tenor” Meeks.



“I simply didn’t think about it,” a distraught Tenor explained afterward. “My vocal sonic powers... glass... God forgive me!” Tenor’s hypersonic scream shattered the eastern pylon of the bridge. The pylon’s collapse dragged down the rest of the bridge.

Tenor abandoned the battle at once to rescue motorists from the frigid waters and high currents. The Teragen criminal, identified as Damian Storm, took the opportunity to escape.

Tacoma City Manager Ann Keoh not only holds Tenor personally responsible for the destruction, she plans to extend her suit to Project Utopia, who trained Tenor at its Seattle Rashoud facility. “Tenor’s little ‘accident’ proves the need for strict regulation of novas,” she said. “With power like theirs, even the slightest mistakes become catastrophic.” Project Utopia has promised to issue a statement in response after consulting with its attorneys.

Keoh also suggested a lawsuit against Ardis Longley, arguing that the bridge’s vitrium construction was inherently defective. Longley responded angrily when asked about the city manager’s planned suit:

“It’s simply ridiculous. Vitrium is stronger than steel in every way but this, and I built that bridge more than twice as strong as safety codes demand. I did test vitrium’s resistance to high-frequency vibration, but

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not at Tenor's intensity. Who'd have thought that the one nova in the world who could wreck my bridge would end up fighting on it?" Nevertheless, Longley promises to seek a way to make vitrium resistant to sonic damage. She even publicly offered to replace the bridge at cost.

The fall of the Artifex-Chihuly bridge is the second time a bridge over this narrow waterway has collapsed. The very first Tacoma Narrows Bridge, nicknamed "Galloping Gertie," tore itself to pieces during high winds in 1940. Longley cited "Galloping Gertie" as a cautionary tale for and about engineers:

"We aren't gods; we can't predict everything," she said. "The unexpected sometimes happens."

Vitrium has most of the structural properties of steel, at a quarter the weight. It is also transparent and can be colored, blown, spun or shaped like any other sort of glass. Unfortunately, every major structure built of vitrium has a resonant frequency that will make it shatter like a crystal goblet. In effect, the building cannot soak any damage done by sound of that frequency.

Owners of buildings made in whole or in part of vitrium now weigh the cost of replacing the structures against the odds that a nova with sonic powers, or some other freakish circumstance, will hit that precise frequency.

Story Use: Buildings made wholly or in part of vitrium add color to a story setting. Someone might try to duplicate Tenor's feat using an electronic sound generator, as a way to extort money from the local government or to make a terrorist statement.

Eufiber

Popular Encyclopedia, 2007 edition

EUFIBER: A light-transmitting polymer invented/ exuded by Costa Rican designer and nova Anibál Buendia in 2001. "Eufiber" is actually a trademark name owned by the Buendia Corporation, but in common speech is often treated as a generic name.

Eufiber is a tube-shaped molecule composed chiefly of carbon, nitrogen and magnesium. Photons become "entrained" within the tube, unable either to leave or be absorbed. As a result, light passes through the tube with virtually no loss of signal strength or clarity. Originally, eufiber was secreted from the epidermis of Buendia himself, but Ardis Longley's pioneering experimentation on eufiber colonies has led to the development of synthetic varieties that duplicate most of organic eufiber's properties.

Since its discovery, eufiber has superseded copper and optical fiber as a medium for data transmission cables. It equals optical fiber for the volume of data that can pass through a eufiber cable of a given diameter, at a fraction of the cost. Its physical resilience and chemical stability have also led to the use of eufiber in the textile industry.

See also: BUENDIA, ANIBÁL; CARBON; FIBER OPTICS; LONGLEY, ARDIS; MATERIALS SCIENCE

"Now Yamaguchi will show what designs he has cooked up for the women of the world. Yamaguchi was a Buendia protégé and one of the first designers to use his mentor's eufiber and LEDs in clothing, wasn't he?"

"That's right, Joyce. Rumor has it that this year, Yamaguchi's going far beyond the luminous piping and patches he popularized in *haute couture*. The program says his first model will be Kishi, wearing 'Under the Sea.' Here she comes and... Wow!"

"Wow is right, Etienne. This dress has some of the simplest lines I've ever seen from Yamaguchi, but the waves of blue and green light — I've never seen anything like it! Oh look, there he is! Mr. Yamaguchi! Mr. Yamaguchi, sir, how does it work?"

"Hello... Joyce? Yes, it is marvelous. Glowing eufiber cloth is nothing new. The light-emitting diodes are cheap enough. I, however, have gone one step beyond. Not only do the golden plaques contain the LEDs and the batteries, they also contain a computer chip. The cloth is woven like a TV screen and the computer sends signals to light up each thread first one color, then another. 'Under the Sea' uses two colors of light to make eight different shades."

"It's amazing, Mr. Yamaguchi. I think you and Kishi have given Etienne a seizure."

"Wha...? Oh! Yes, 'Under the Sea' is *magnifique*! I can hardly wait to see your second dress — let's see, 'Windows'? I can hardly wait!"

"Down, Etienne. Mr. Yamaguchi, I don't see another model listed."

"There is no other model, Joyce. There is no other dress. There are only programs. Kishi presses the stud to activate the *second* chip and... 'Windows'!"

"I don't believe it."

"I know, from the sublime to the ridiculous. What can I say, Joyce? For the kind of money ViaSoft paid me, I can stand to put a screen saver on a dress."

**Paris,
Feb. 12, 2006**

LEDs and Micromachinery

Ian clipped the cape to his shoulder tabs, adjusted his mask and shut the locker on his street clothes. At Club Quantum, he was Black Dragon. (Not Megaflex. He would save Megaflex for when he was *really* a nova.) He strutted from the locker room to the club proper and surveyed the floor with what he hoped was haughty contempt. Several of his fellow novaphiles had come that night, mingling with the less devoted baselines. He knew many of them in his mundane life too, but at the club they pretended not to know about those "secret identities."

Professor Shade, Veteran, Rainbow, Pagan... Ian caught his breath. He'd never before seen the babe chatting with Hazard. Her costume was chiefly made of thigh-length white boots and some scraps of tinsel, glittering sharply against her skin. Her eyes *glowed* with a twinkling white radiance. Could she be — No, the management would have trumpeted it to the skies if an actual nova visited, just as they had when Odd John sang last year. He eyed her up and down. What a hottie!

Her name was Argent and he had less trouble prying her away from Pagan than he thought. The geek with the plastic horns wanted to dance with her too, but a few quick exchanges of rock-paper-scissors decided the question. "You realize we're rivals from now on!" Hazard said. "Watch your back at the next LARP!" "Whatever, loser," Ian muttered.



The technology developed to manufacture computer chips can also be used to make micromachines. NovaEyez™ are just one of the more frivolous examples. The contact lenses contain a band of tiny light-emitting diodes and thermocouples (devices that turn heat into electricity). They never run out of power and last next to forever. Although NovaEyez™ are very new, they will spread very quickly through the novaphile subculture, despite their expense — corresponding to three dots of Resources. More fanatical body-modifiers can have NovaEyez™ permanently affixed to their corneas, or have LEDs implanted under their skin in interesting designs or locations.

Between songs, Ian asked about her eyes. “Special contacts,” she said. “They’re called ‘NovaEyez™.’ Very bleeding-edge. They’re, like, powered entirely by body heat.” “Slash!” Ian said, then slyly added, “You know, when I first saw you, I thought you were, like, a real nova.” Argent giggled, and the line earned him his first kiss. Argent admitted that she’d wondered if he were a nova too. “I can tell you don’t need any padding in your costume,” she purred as she ran her hand over the glowing dragon logo on his thighs.

They left Club Quantum together. He was gonna score! On the way to his apartment, Ian told her about his Megaflex costume. Argent said she’d like to see him in it — and then out of it. She promised him a surprise, too.

As she writhed beneath him, clutching his back and calling, “Megaflex, oh, Megaflex,” he found out where else she glowed....

Novaphiles engage in other body modifications, too. In addition to the more traditional practices of the self-consciously kewl, such as tattoos and body piercings, novaphiles may use screw-ons: a little flange of surgical steel screwed to a bone and penetrating the skin. One then attaches various accessories to the flange, such as Ian’s LED disk or Pagan’s artificial horns. Screw-ons only cost two Resource dots.

Story Use: NovaEyez™, LED implants and screw-ons are mostly meant as colorful set decoration. A careless character, however, might mistake a mitoid, petty crook or over-enthusiastic fanboy loser wearing NovaEyez™ for a genuine nova and attack with full force — and tragic results.

Micromachinery also finds use in medical sensors, computer security systems and a wide range of other functions. Just like a new computer chip, a new micromechanical device can become the focus of industrial espionage.

War, it seems, will always be with us — and therefore, weapons research will always be with us too. We may take some small comfort in the observation that weapons reached their pinnacle of lethality in the thermonuclear bomb. In 50 years, no one has seriously proposed anything more destructive. Even “Doomsday Plague” microbes — which became feasible at least 20 years ago — remain in the realm of science fiction. No one has deployed them. Anyone can appreciate that a victory which leaves no one alive is no victory.

Nova super-soldiers have done much to make weapons of mass destruction unfashionable. They can wreck missiles and warheads with shocking ease. On the other hand, the threat of so-called “elites” has prompted great interest in more powerful weapons of pinpoint destruction.

Sheer lethality has lost some of its appeal, too. If you kill an elite, you cannot make him an offer to fight for you instead. As for clashes between the police and nova criminals, why, the police want to make sure the nova receives the blame for the deaths of any innocent bystanders....

Homing Missiles

The missile roared up between the buildings. A few seconds later, a dusty, dented gasburner edged out of the alley and drove away.

As it approached the city center, the missile leveled off to fly parallel to the ground. It dodged between skyscrapers, shot up into a loop and plunged down the face of City Hall, straight into the podium. The explosion sent the crowd sprawling and ripped the woman at the podium into a spray of metal and shredded plastic. A strut from her arm smashed open a city councilman’s head.

Kikjak shot from the ground before anyone else. He hovered over the rooftop, eyes blazing with an eerie blue light. As he scanned right, left, front and back, a blue radiance gathered around his clenched fists.

“Mother-fuck!”

he snarled.

“What the fuck was that?”

Weapons

A man in a black suit and black sunglasses hurried out of City Hall, closely followed by the twin of the destroyed robot. The man waved his arm and shouted, “Kikjak! Down here! You’ll never find them!”

“That was a homing missile!” the man continued. “It could have been fired from anywhere! Now get down here! The paramedics will need your K-ray vision — and to fly the worst cases to the hospital!”

“Mother-fuck!” Kikjak screamed in frustration and shot a blue bolt of radiation skyward, then dropped to the ground again. Cries and moans of pain rose from the wounded government officials, police and bystanders. *Damn, them bitches ganked my clients on national fucking TV with the Nike Board of Directors watching and everything*, he thought bitterly. If he ever caught up with the motherfuckers who fired that missile, he was gonna shove the whole damn firing system up somebody’s ass horizontally!

This weapon is a miniature cruise missile. Adjustable fins let the missile steer in flight; radar guides it on its way. A tiny computer holds a digital map of the region. The missile flies around corners and obstacles to reach its destination, then strikes. It might have a radar profile of a target as well, so that it could (for instance) attack anything tank-shaped in the general target area.



A person can fire the missile from more than a kilometer away, but the homing missile works only if it has an extremely accurate map. Governments prepare such maps from satellite photos and flyovers with radar-equipped planes. These maps are highly classified, especially the maps of the nation's own urban areas...which means that they are difficult, but not impossible, for unauthorized people to obtain.

The standard homing missile carries an antitank warhead, a tightly focused charge designed to take out large, armored vehicles. A variation replaces the high-explosive charge with a fragmentation grenade, to make a long-distance antipersonnel weapon. Homing grenades are meant for use in house-to-house fighting, so a soldier can

take out an enemy command post from several blocks away. Terrorists have figured out that they can use a homing missile to assassinate a government official or bomb a building from a mile away — and no one will know where they fired it from.

Both sorts of homing missiles have an attack dice pool of 6: they completely ignore range penalties, but the user's skill does not matter. The fragmentation-grenade version does 8d10 lethal damage to all targets within three meters of ground zero and half damage to targets within six meters.

Story Use: Novas might hunt an enemy who kills using homing missiles. They will need all their wits to stop an enemy who strikes from a kilometer away.

"Listen up, people," Captain Goss said as he entered the precinct house. The 18 men and women stopped their various activities to watch him. The three officers with Goss laid their cases on the table before him.

"The new weapons are in," Goss continued. "I've been briefed on them, and now, it's my turn to brief you. Shut up until I'm done. Then you can ask questions."

"That wrongful-death lawsuit last year hit us hard. That's why we won't get any new squadcars this year or next year. What money the department had left went for these."

Angry mutters rose from the assembled cops. "I *know* you don't like this," Goss said. "But we *have* to do this. The department cannot afford another settlement like that! You'll just have to make the best of it."

"You will still have pistols and rifles available if you need them. These weapons are to give you more alternatives to lethal force. Cops have used most of these weapons for years in hostage situations. Now we're taking them on the street to take down everyday perps."

"You will receive a variety of nonlethal weapons. The brass downtown aren't sure which ones will work the best. You and officers from other precincts will file reports on how well the different weapons worked in various situations — I know, more paperwork. Tough luck. Next year, the department will buy more of the ones that work the best." Goss opened the cases and pulled out a series of large-muzzled guns.

"First we have three types of guns that fire soft projectiles. These can knock over a perp and maybe knock him out without drawing blood. The good old beanbag shotgun fires a bag of lead shot. It'll raise a hell of a bruise and maybe break a bone, but

hardly anyone's died from it. This other gun fires a big slug of foam rubber for the same effect. And this one" — Goss frowned — "you'll have to see to believe. It shoots a rubber slug that expands into a ring, sort of like a doughnut. The brass have heard of other soft projectile guns, but I guess these have the best and longest track record."

"Another option is to immobilize a suspect without harming him — we hope. And how do you immobilize someone? You throw a net over him, of course. This gun fires a net, weighted to expand and wrap around a target. Alternatively, you shoot him with this foamthrower — the goop gun, some people call it. Instead of a projectile, it sprays a chemical foam that rapidly expands and hardens."

"I have high hopes for the goop gun, by the way. The giggle factor has inhibited its use, but I think we may be able to exploit this: Even if a perp is not restrained by the foam, he may feel so silly at looking like he was in a pie fight that he gives up. Hey, we can hope. I've also heard that you can quickly make impromptu barriers with the foam. These won't stop a determined mob, but they will buy you a few extra seconds in which to move or obtain more lethal weapons."

"All right, moving on. Ever see those nature shows where a scientist shoots an animal with tranquilizer darts? Well, someone finally noticed the sort of animals *we* deal with. This sawed-off shotgun fires flechettes — tiny darts — instead of shot or slugs, and each flechette injects a powerful sedative."

"The trunk shotgun is meant for crowd control. We also received a pistol version that fires single darts, for use as

Nonlethal Weapons

A Baltimore Police Station,
September, 2008

a personal sidearm. Try not to shoot anyone with more than two of these darts. They could die of an overdose and we're trying to avoid killing, remember?

"And then we have... this." Goss opened the longest case and lifted out an enormous rifle. "Only the SWAT team will receive these but I thought you should know about them anyway.

"This is a .50 caliber elephant gun. We'll have them in case a nova comes to town and starts misbehaving. A lot of novas are bulletproof — but this gun fires special ammunition."

Goss opened a small case and lifted out a foam tray of gleaming cartridges, each four inches long. "These bullets work something like the air hypos that doctors use. Each bullet contains a powerful sedative. When the bullet hits, the sedative is forced out the tip through a narrow channel at incredible pressure — enough to force it through a nova's skin. Even if a nova can bounce bullets off his chest, he can still be drugged. Probably. Maybe some novas are tough enough to resist the trunk rifle, but it beats what we have — because right now, if one of the beautiful people wakes up in a bad mood and decides to trash a bank instead of an N! set, what we have is nothing.

"You will all practice with these new weapons on the target range. I have a schedule sheet right here. Any questions?"

Trank Rifle Ammunition

The bullet conforms to the normal game statistics for a rifle (see *Aberrant*, p. 275). It can easily incapacitate or kill a normal human. If the bullet inflicts a single health level of damage to the target, it also forces the sedative into the target's flesh. The fast-acting tranquilizer will knock out an elephant in less than a minute, while a human will probably die from such a powerful dose. A nova gets a normal Resistance roll; if her metabolism

fails to overcome the drug, she loses three dice from all dice pools for 100 minutes, minus 10 minutes for each dot of Stamina or Mega-Stamina. Each dot of Mega-Stamina also reduces the tranquilizer's effect by one die (thus, a character with two dots of Mega-Stamina would only lose one die from dice pools). Some Mega-Stamina enhancements (such as Regeneration or Adaptability) might make a nova completely immune to the tranquilizer's effect (at the Storyteller's discretion).

Trank Shotgun

Research into anti-nova tranquilizer ammunition paid off with a tranquilizer round to use for crowd control. Instead of one big dart, this shotgun shell contains a dozen little darts (technically called flechettes — do not confuse this, however, with the magnetically propelled "flechette rifle" described in *Aberrant*). Each little dart holds a dose of a potent sedative.

Instead of firing in a tight cluster, like normal shotgun pellets, the darts are designed to spread out in a cone. It's quite impossible to aim at a specific person with these rounds, unless one is at point-blank range. This ammunition is always treated as a strafing maneuver, covering one meter for every two meters from the attacker. Thus, the odds of attacking any particular person drop very quickly with distance.

Each dart does just two dice of lethal damage. The tranquilizer, however, inflicts one die of damage on each of the next six turns thereafter. This is special damage: Although treated as bashing damage for purposes of recovery, normal humans cannot soak it (but novas can).

If someone fires a trunk shotgun round into a tight crowd of people, the Storyteller may simply assume that eight to 15 people are hit. (A few people might be hit by more than one dart. If they receive prompt medical care, they won't die.)

Trank Pistol

This is the basic air pistol used by veterinarians and naturalists, but with greater range and rate of fire. Its dart acts just like a single flechette from the trank shotgun. If it inflicts a single health level of damage, it injects the tranquilizer.

Soft Projectiles

Soft projectiles inflict bashing damage instead of lethal damage. All the various soft projectiles have the same game effect. (Their differences are too small to be worth reflecting in rules, especially since they cannot affect most novas.)

Foamthrower

This device looks and works much like a flamethrower, but instead of napalm it shoots a stream of chemicals that instantly expand into a tough, sticky foam. This acts just like one dot of the nova power Immobilize, reducing the Dexterity of anyone sprayed with the copious foam. The attacker makes a roll of Dexterity + Firearms to hit. Then the attacker initiates a resisted roll, her Dexterity + Firearms vs. the target's Dexterity to find how many dots of Dexterity the target loses. A target reduced to zero Dexterity cannot move. The foam, however, only has "Strength" of 2 and two "health levels"; thus, a normal person can easily break out of the foam in a few turns. That is probably long enough for the police to immobilize the target in some more effective way.

Net Gun

Similar to a foamthrower, a net gun is used to immobilize targets. It fires a tough net made from a eufiber derivative. Treat as a foamthrower, except for the different stats in the Weapons Chart and the fact that the net has a "Strength" of 4 and six "health levels."

EMP Grenade

Quarles steered his motorcycle onto the crowded freeway. The nimble machine easily dodged between the bulky cars and trucks. To slow them even further, he tossed a handful of flash pellets over his shoulders. Shocked drivers slammed on their brakes; Quarles heard the gratifying sound of colliding bumpers behind him. No one would follow him on the ground.

That left the air. Two flying squadcars approached him, one from the front and one from the side. When they were 15 meters away, Quarles pulled a long silver canister from the pouch by his seat, flicked a switch and tossed it in the air. The canister crackled and sparked for a moment. Every car within 30 meters stopped as its engine died. The two squadcars were no exception. They crumpled nicely as they plunged into the traffic. Quarles patted his rumbling, smoke-belching bike. Good old electronics-free gasburner!

By the time more police arrived, Quarles had vanished down a side street. The motorcycle went in the back of his sleek new minivan. Now he only had to deliver the EMP-shielded case of data chips he'd stolen from the safety-deposit box. For a moment, Quarles wondered what data they held that was worth his fee, not to mention the bank employees he'd killed. Then he reminded himself that it really didn't matter.

These grenades create a powerful microwave pulse through a sudden electrical discharge. The electromagnetic pulse instantly burns out delicate electronics, blows fuses and trips circuit breakers. An EMP grenade can black out a building or fry a vehicle's electrical systems. Computers are damaged beyond repair and data is wiped from magnetic storage media. The grenade does not harm anything else and makes no noise except for a short crackle when it goes off.

Most military vehicles and electronics, however, are shielded against electromagnetic pulses — or at least against the small pulses created by grenades.

Sonic Security Systems

SCARED OF BURGLARS? MAKE THEM SCARED INSTEAD!

The **PHOBIA FIELD** uses advanced sonic science to fill intruders with **UNREASONING DREAD!** A burglar who enters **YOUR** property will think that **MAYBE HE'D BETTER LEAVE WHILE HE CAN!**

Let **SONIC SECURITY SYSTEMS, INC.** install a **PHOBIA FIELD** as part of your business' **TOTAL SECURITY PLAN.**

Remember:

THEIR FEAR IS YOUR PROTECTION!

The "Phobia Field" uses the same low-frequency sound waves as terr'r music. Tiny sonic devices make an area unpleasant to enter. Most burglars will turn back if they feel a sudden attack of anxiety — especially since the sonic projectors also periodically play the sound of footsteps and doors opening, giving a burglar more reason to suspect he could be discovered at any moment. A Phobia Field could be installed within a building or around a property's perimeter as a way to discourage intruders.

In game terms, the subsonic projectors give a protected area three dice of Intimidation. This can give an ordinary office the feel of a graveyard at midnight. A strong-willed person who recognizes the effect, or who is sufficiently motivated, can resist the Phobia Field with a Willpower roll.

The three dice also add to any Intimidation attempts by security guards or other people. Security guards typically carry a small "anti-sound" generator that shields them from the effect.

A variation on the Phobia Field causes pain and nausea instead. If the intruder fails a Stamina roll, she loses two dice from all dice pools and may also throw up.

Story Use: Even a nova might find herself wondering at inexplicable fear, until she figures out what's causing it.

Ranged Weapon Chart

Type	Acc	Damage	Range	Mnv	RoF	Clip	Conc	Mass	Cost
Trank Pistol	0	2d10 L, S	50	Ms, Tw	2	17+1	J	0.5	••
Trank Shotgun	0	2d10 L, S	20	Ms, St	2	8+1	T	3	•••
Trank Rifle	+2	2d10 L, S	200	n/a	1	5+1	N	4	•••
Soft Projectile Gun	0	5d10 B	30	n/a	1	6	T	3	•••
Foamthrower	+2	S	5	n/a	1	15	N	20	•••
Net Gun	0	S	5	n/a	1	4	N	3	•••
Homing Antitank Missile	(6)	10d10 L [8]	2500	n/a	1	1	N	20	••••
Homing Grenade Missile	(6)	8d10 L, S	2500	n/a	1	1	N	20	••••

Acc: Accuracy indicates the number of dice added to the shooter's dice pool. (Note that the homing missiles use a fixed dice pool.)

Damage: Indicates the damage dice pool for the weapon. B: bashing damage; L: lethal damage; S: special type of damage, see weapon's description for details.

Range: This gives the practical range in meters.

Mnv: Maneuvers lists the available special attacks available to the weapon. Effects of these maneuvers are listed in the Combat section of *Aberrant*. Ms = Multiple Shots, St = Strafing, Tw = Two Weapons.

RoF: Rate of fire, the number of shots that can be made in a turn using the weapon.

Clip: The number of shots a gun can hold, or at least the number of times a weapon can be used before needing some sort of reloading and servicing.

Conc: Concealability of the weapon. J = Can be hidden in a jacket; T = Can be hidden under a trenchcoat; N = Cannot be hidden at all.

Mass: The weapon's mass in kilograms.

Cost: Represents the value of the weapon in Resource dots. Note that all these weapons cost more than conventional guns because of their novelty and their need for special, high-tech ammunition.

n/a: Not applicable. The trait has no relevance for this particular weapon.

Optional: Super-Science

Aberrant is fundamentally about characters, not gadgets; about the choices that godlike power brings. That means saying no to one of the hoariest traditions of comic-book super-science: that technology has no long-term consequences for the rest of the world. In the comic books, Dr. Techno can invent an Instant Cloning Machine, a starship or *anything* the author needs to advance the plot — and no one ever hears of it again, no matter how useful his invention might be!

Therefore, **Aberrant** presumes that although nova super-scientists can make *limited* breakthroughs in science and technology, they cannot make *radical* advances. They must still build upon existing science — and for 2008, that means the real science of the present day. (To some degree, the technology of the more remote future has been decided upon already; see **Trinity**.)

A scientist hardly has to be a nova to discover or invent things that change the world. It didn't take a nova to invent computers, the laser or antibiotics. Still... the game *does* permit characters who are as much smarter than an ordinary person as Superman is stronger. Therefore, in **Aberrant**, a character can deliberately set out to make a significant advance in a field of science — and do it. This requires five successes on an Intelligence + Science roll, with the difficulty set according to how original the discovery will be. (For instance, after doctors have found cures for five or six types of cancer, the seventh and eighth aren't too much of a challenge. Curing a case of Taint mutation, however, will lead a physician into uncharted frontiers of medicine.)

At the Storyteller's discretion, a few characters can break the "plausibility barrier" and produce any invention, however wild and woolly. They can create interstellar warp portals, free-willed robots or even Ultimate Weapons!

The following restrictions apply:

- The character must have time. Baseline scientists may take years to pin down a great discovery. Mega-geniuses shouldn't complain about spending a few months in the lab.
- The character must have a dice pool in the relevant science that is flat-out impossible for a non-nova. Since a baseline human could have a dice pool of 11 (5 Intelligence and 5 Science, with a specialty in the relevant branch of science), this means the character must have Mega-Intelligence.
- The character must have five dots in Science.
- Feats of revolutionary super-science have a difficulty of +4, at least.
- Botching the roll means that something bad happens. *Very* bad. Possibly "endangers-the-entire-world" bad. The character will become rather unpopular.
- The super-scientist gains a dot of permanent Taint. This comes from the dehumanizing effect of understanding "that which no mortal can know." At the Storyteller's discretion, the character loses that dot of Taint if she succeeds in teaching baseline humans how the invention works,

thereby turning it from super-science to cutting-edge mainstream science. By doing so, the character has reaffirmed her humanity against the seductive call of godhood.

Why don't Mega-Science breakthroughs revolutionize the world? A number of factors might account for it, apart or in combination:

- **No One Wants It.** History is full of stunningly brilliant inventions that were never developed because not enough people wanted them. So your Plasma Vortex Cannon can destroy a city. Big deal. Governments already have nukes. Can it do something *useful*?

- **Too Advanced.** Teaching other people how your device works is like explaining radio to a Kalahari Bushman. You can teach him to "press this button, turn this knob and the sounds come out," but try explaining radio waves and transistors. If anyone wanted to mass-produce your device, first they would have to make the proper tools, and the tools to make the tools.... And that *costs*.

- **Only Works for Novas.** The world of **Aberrant** has only one source of quantum energy: a living nova. If your device requires a nova operator, the baselines won't have much interest in copying it. Novas aren't exactly common, y'know.

- **Side Effects.** A device might have side effects that make it dangerous, unreliable or otherwise inconvenient to widely apply. (For instance, a weather-control machine won't catch on if it eats up a pound of diamonds every day it operates.)

Thus, a device of highly specialized purpose, operating by principles no one else quite understands, that would cost a great deal to duplicate but offers no overwhelming benefit — such a device might remain a scientific curiosity. Eventually it will break down and no one will be able to repair it. Future generations will marvel at another stillborn scientific wonder, like Leonardo da Vinci's sketch of a helicopter.

Conclusion

The nova "super-genius," then, stands revealed as still mortal. He or she is not a god. Look behind every miracle of the Nova Age, and you will find the hard work of multitudes.

The spectacular achievements of nova scientists tempt us with complacency. We should resist that temptation and remember that science is a supremely *collaborative* process — and that collaboration extends beyond the scientific community, to the universities, corporations and governments that pay for most research today.

Public support for science is more important than ever. Now that we *know* we can solve the problems of poverty, health, education and the environment, we have a moral duty — each and every one of us — to see them solved as quickly as possible. Suffering may ennoble the spirit, but *needless* suffering ennobles no one.

Dr. Paul Tandy is an Associate Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Georgia and a member of the Aeon Society Think Tank.

CREDITS

Credits

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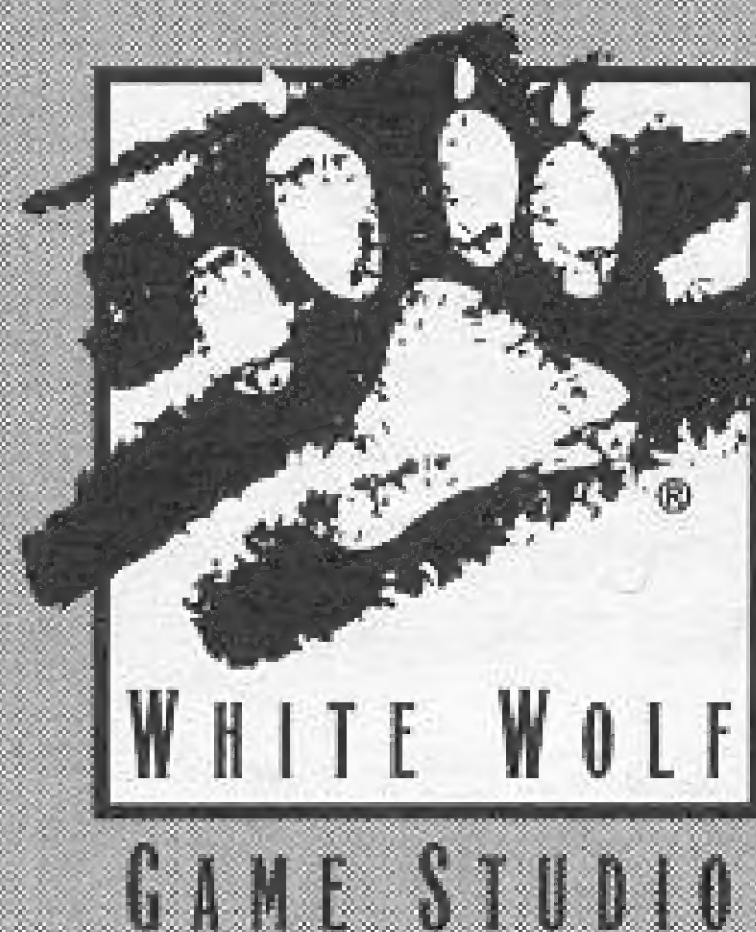
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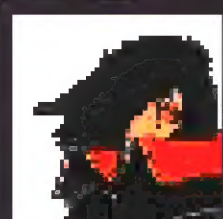
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